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**TV ATTACKS WITH MICHAEL MOORE**

**5 YEARS ON THE STREET**  
**BEST OF OUR VOICE**  
**ANNIVERSARY EDITION**

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## Hey Squeegees! Welcome to unfriendly Manitoba

Winnipeg, MB.

As spring approaches, it would appear that the city's squeegee kids have been sold down the river by politicians and social agency bureaucrats.

Last spring, a fifty person plus task force set up by the city recommended that kids who wanted to squeegee be licensed and that special areas be set up for them to ply their honest trade. Instead city hall passed a bylaw banning the activity and urging that alternatives be looked at.

The bylaw is due for review in September but no one expects council to overturn the ban.

Some are confused by Glen Murray, now Mayor of Winnipeg, who was more empathetic to the situation at the time. Said Murray, councillor at the time, "I hope we move from prohibition to licensing." He said this one day after he had voted for the bylaw banning the practice.

Now Murray's efforts are going into a group called Powerhouse Winnipeg Inc..

Powerhouse hopes to grab large chunks of government money to convert an old brewery into space for adolescent social agencies. This is where they can transform street youth into entrepreneurs turning out t-shirts and tourist trinkets. It will be run strictly as a commercial enterprise, with no room for a youth shelter even though one is badly needed.

The group has already secured \$160,000 in grants from the city and immediately spent \$55,000 hiring an executive director, Carol Barton.

The social agency pushing this project is the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

The only politician who voted against the bylaw last year was city councillor Al Golden.

"The task force set up to look at the squeegee problem should never have accepted a compromise," he says. "They recommended a sensible licensing system but instead allowed a total ban while assessments were made. Now I doubt the bylaw will be overturned."

Golden isn't the only politician who feels the squeegee kids have been sold down the river. Shirley Lord, a member of choices, a major Winnipeg social justice group, says "the whole issue has been badly handled," and notes that "squeegee kids behaved very responsibly and participated fully in coming up with solutions that included recommending some system of licensing and a code of good conduct."

Many believe the kids have now been criminalised and victimised, becoming fodder for trendy social workers to make grant applications for grand training schemes, which isn't what the kids asked for. They asked for freedom to be self employed and do the work they wanted to do, rather than be forced into poverty and crime.

Last year several kids were harassed and some were charged and fined \$25 for daring to offer their cleaning service to passing motorists. Most were eventually intimidated enough to stop work and move to other cities.

One of them, Andrew La-Liberty, had his head smashed on the

top of a police cruiser till a bus driver intervened. No charges were laid and La-Liberty moved on to Calgary, where he had few hassles at that time. But his home is in Winnipeg and he's recently returned, plying his illegal trade at Broadway and Portage Avenue.

"We're going to defy the law until they force us to stop," he says. To be on the safe side, he and his partner Ryan "Moss" Peatson only work an hour at a time. So far they haven't been arrested and many passing motorists have honked in support of their rebellion.

Even the occasional police person has smiled and waved, but it's still a precarious existence and a politician may any day order the police to enforce the bylaw.

Meanwhile socially conscious politicians, who were once in favour of local squeegee work, are strangely silent on this matter. Mayor Glen Murray, once closely tied to the NDP and the unions, has declared himself to be really a supporter of small business and free enterprise. His recent opposition to the entrepreneurial spirit of the squeegee kids is unfounded.

The squeegees, who just wanted to work, are about to become "clients" as the bureaucrats prepare to spend thousands of dollars on reports, studies and coordinator salaries.

It's common knowledge that City Hall wants the streets cleaned up in time for the Pan Am Games, which begin July 23 of



Plying the streets of Winnipeg for a few dollars.

PHOTO: RODNEY GRAHAM

this year. Squeegee kids might offend tourists and other visitors or so the politically correct thinking goes.

On March 8, a small group of squeegee supporters who believe the kids have been manipulated and sold out made a presentation to the city's protection and community services committee. They were urging them to legalise the squeegees and spend \$10-15,000 to set up a special curb lane specifically for squeegee kids.

But no one expects any action to be taken because the real squeegee issue-which involves economics and freedom to work-has now been hijacked by bureaucratic professionals with their own social service agendas.

All of this is good news to the business persons who belong to the Osborne Village Business Improvement Zone Association, which initially pressured City Hall to ban squeegee activity. The tourists are a comin'.

**By Rodney Graham and Peter Carlyle-Gordge.**

Rodney is a regular contributor to **Our Voice** and heads our distribution in Winnipeg. Peter is a former Manitoba correspondent for **Macleans Magazine** and writes on social issues.

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# Michael Moore

## TV's comic thorn in the side of America's elite

Interview and story by Michael Walters

HE HAS PUT FEAR INTO SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL CORPORATE EXECUTIVES in the world. He has made some of the wealthiest men and women you could ever meet, clam up and chew bitterly on their own humiliation and guilt.

Michael Moore came into TV land with a bag full of tricks and a richly unique sense of humour. His mission: to take on the Corporate Kingdom and bring some justice and prosperity back to the common folk. He's doing it with a film crew, a corporate crime fighting chicken and to prove he has no hard feelings toward the rich, he even showed up at the new \$60 million home of billionaire Bill Gates to present him with a housewarming gift: a weedwacker and some Martha Stewart sheets.

Most people first heard of Moore with the release of his documentary, **Roger and Me**. Moore, a filmmaker from Flint, Michigan, pursued General Motor's Chief Executive Officer Roger Smith. Smith had cut thousands of automotive industry jobs in Moore's hometown as well as in many other parts of the U.S. In **Roger and Me**, Moore focused on the value of human life and the connection of body and soul. But Michael Moore does not want the often depressing realities of the world to fuel our apathy. It would appear that he does not believe in hopelessness.

His new TV series **The Awful Truth** is set to debut on the Bravo network on May 16. Michael was also the director of **TV Nation**, another cult hit television series, and feature film **The Big One** in which he again revealed the injustices of corporate America. He also made **Canadian Bacon**, a satirical comedy about the U.S. declaring war on Canada. Michael Moore spoke with *Our Voice* late in March.

**OV:** I don't know if your familiar with **Our Voice**... we're a street magazine sold by people who are homeless and live in poverty?

**MM:** In fact I've heard of **Our Voice**... and I remember being pretty impressed with it and of course thinking, like most Americans, when you think of Alberta, you don't think about people being homeless. It seems to us that it's uniquely a problem you'd find in our larger American cities. But the truth is, as the gap grows wider between the rich and the poor in both our country and your's, people who you'd never think would end up on the streets are exactly that, out on the streets.

**OV:** Here in Alberta in the last 25 years, but more profoundly in the past six years, there's been a real push by our provincial government toward a more American type of society. One where most public services like health care and social services would be handed over to the private sector. Can you talk about the results of public services being reduced or having none at all?

**MM:** Well to watch your country emulate us in this way is such a sad thing. We have a certain ethic in the United States, for instance, if you get sick, well too bad! The Canadian ethic has essentially always been that there should be a safety net to take care of anyone who may be a bit down on their luck at a certain point in their life and they should not have to suffer the horrible consequences of their life being virtually ruined.

I really hope the show (**The Awful Truth**) will act as a warning siren to people in the U.K. and Canada, that you do not want to become like us (the U.S.), so I encourage you to seize and desist... because as you snip away at the social safety net, as you create this gap that grows wider and wider between the rich and the poor you will start to have all of the social problems that we have in the United States, social problems that are a direct result of this assault on working people and the poor. You will have more crime, more murders, all of these problems you avoided before, you are now going to see more of this because this is what happens when you plunk on the poor.

**OV:** While thinking about Canada striving to be like the U.S. in ways, I read a

recent report on urban poverty in the U.S. which stated that the apparent strong economy has had absolutely no positive impact on hunger and homelessness and that actually in many ways it has made things worse for people. People are poorer than ever, when we hear all the time that a strong economy is the cure for social ills.

**MM:** In the so-called great economy we live in now in the U.S., 20 million people every day receive at least one meal from a soup kitchen, a food bank or some sort of charitable or government sponsored food program. 20 million a day! If you want to be like the U.S. this is what you'll get. Another 40 million people have absolutely no health insurance. If they get sick. So what! Too bad! That's our policy.

Another 40 million people are illiterate. They can't read and write above a grade three level. Is that what you want to be like when you aspire to be like Americans? It's absolute lunacy. I think it should be the other way around. Americans should aspire to be like Canadians. We'd be killing less of each other.

**OV:** So what happened to **TV Nation**? (Moore's first crack at TV)

**MM:** We were first on NBC and then on Fox. The truth is that we were only ordered as a summer series. So we were never really canceled, but it takes about eight months to do eight shows and we had a very difficult time dealing with the networks and the censorship. We were banned essentially from discussing certain political issues like gay rights or abortion, those kinds of things. We were told not to do stories on these subjects. It was too difficult to do that battle each week with the networks. Now Channel Four in Great Britain is the producer of the show, which means there is no censorship, no subject is prohibited. What you're gonna see from **The Awful Truth** is **TV Nation**, but no holds barred and without the heavy hand of American censorship.

**OV:** Your use of humour is great as you bring a lot of these issues to light. We here in Edmonton find ourselves working in the trenches everyday trying to show people that poverty actually does exist. How are you able to do it so effectively with humour?

**MM:** I was raised in an Irish-Catholic household so you have a pretty sharp viewpoint of how the world is run and you tend to look at it in pretty dark terms. You have to develop a sense of humour to deal with it.

I don't think it helps people to produce a documentary or any non-fiction television, where after you've watched it for an hour you're so damn depressed you just throw your hands up in the air and say there's nothing you can do, you know you can't fight city hall, the world's a mess and then you sink into your cynicism and despair.

That's the last thing I want people to do. I want people, when they watch my show, to get pissed off, to get up off the couch and do something and I think humour helps them and keeps them from being depressed and steers them toward being angry in a good way. I've always felt humour is a very powerful weapon. After people watch my show I hope people are a little enlightened about what's going on... and it's enough for me that the average working stiff watches the show at the end of the day and goes, wow that was good, you know there's one for our side and to be entertained by it, I feel that's a worthwhile contribution.

Call him what you want, a defender of the people, a crusader for justice, Michael Moore is a kind, supportive and downright funny guy who is having a wonderfully positive effect on how many people view the world.

In next month's edition of *Our Voice* we will complete our discussion with Michael Moore and preview some of the episodes of his new series **The Awful Truth** which debuts in May. To hear *Our Voice's* interview with Michael Moore in its entirety, tune into CJSR FM 88.5 on Thursday, April 8 at 12:00 pm. All of Michael Moore's films are available at your local video store.





# Globalisation meets poverty

## — CONCLUSION —

by Kasandra Caldwell

### Unions Have Betrayed the Poor

It was the new laws after the 1930s that made the unions. Before that, it was difficult to form and protect a union. Unions used to protect the wages of the poorest by setting a good wage for its own workers. The poor always had hope of a better wage if they joined a union. However, the unions have betrayed the poor.

They take a greedy, selfish, "me, me, me" attitude, supposedly an enlightened one from the 1980s, and have not supported the rights of the poor. For example, they prevent minority groups from joining them.

My ex-husband was a business manager for the Pipefitters Union in Edmonton. In 1983, he told me that that Union had never allowed women, had no women, and would never allow women, because that "would weaken the union". As of now, the Pipefitters Union has 50 women, out of 5400 members. "They just don't apply," said the public relations man!

It is no wonder that no one cares about protecting the unions anymore.

### Corporations are taking over democracy

We think that "democracy" means "democracy and free enterprise". It does not. "Democracy" means a vote for each "person". However, with corporations and the rich taking over the ear of government, we are fast losing our democratic right to an equal vote for each person. That means each "person" that has to suffer under government laws, not each "corporation" that only benefits from those laws.

"Free enterprise" means leaving global corporations to do as they will, without regard for the realities of life for the rest of us. Free enterprise alone did not produce a healthy economy for the 1930s, and it did not produce a middle class, or hope. "Total free enterprise" means "no democracy".

# POVERTY meets GLOBALISATION



Kasandra Caldwell, Our Voice vendor, in front of the Hong Kong Bank of Canada in Edmonton.

### A mixed economy and a strong middle class mean democracy.

We can vote to not only stop bank mergers, we can vote to stop globalisation in the interests of the poor and middle class. We can re-vote for a "mixed economy", which means a "combination of free enterprise and socialism". By "socialism", I do not mean "communism, where an elite few take away the voting power of the many", I mean compassionate policies for the weak minorities, with equal voting rights for all persons.

The right wing tells us that communism is socialism, and that socialism leads to foolishness as we saw in the Soviet Republic. Communism is not socialism, it is a system governed by political elite. Global corporatism is a system governed by the financial elite, with still no votes for you and me.

### Conclusion

The poor and the middle class, are as good as anyone else. The poor do not have to feel ashamed of being imperfect humans. The poor have a right to speak out. They should speak out at all costs, even it comes out garbled because they are physically or mentally disabled.

The middle class has to support our income levels by promoting a mixed economy for our country and those that trade with us.

They can help the poor during globalisation by demanding that:

- The countries we trade with pay fair wages, and support unions.
- They support a strong middle class, through New Deal style tax breaks.
- They support better education.
- They support the poor and disabled at the poverty line (Low Income Cutoff).
- They (especially Japan and China now) freely buy our products, in order to support free trade with them.
- Our government do the above for us and ours.
- Our government follow the lead of successful countries such as those of Europe, instead of losers such as New Zealand.
- Our world's governments prevent global corporations from taking away our voting power, in this or in an international government. ♦

*This has been the conclusion of Our Voice writer and vendor Kasandra Caldwell's look at the effects globalisation has and will continue to have on poor people. Thank you to Kasandra for her feelings and her work on the three articles.*



# TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.

Call and leave your comment: 428-4001 | Toll Free 1-888-428-4001

### Some of us little people are wising up to this "Game"

I like the healthy scepticism on the page seven article of the January *Our Voice*, regarding possible benefits the 2001 World's Track and Field games will bring to Edmonton. The whole underlying tone of the writing reflects an improvement I see occurring in the social/economic consciousness of many working Canadians. Over the last ten to fifteen years, we've clued in to just how economically parasitical professional sports teams and spectacles most often are. These last two decades have seen increasing numbers of modest-sized cities like Edmonton, getting their first pro sports teams with players receiving "out of this galaxy" salaries.

But contrary to constant media/business propaganda, we have not seen this put money in citizen's pockets. Rather, we've seen strong evidence of quite the opposite. Let me use the sports boosters own "logic" to make a tongue in cheek "defense" of their point of view. Being a 55 model, I remember how "tough" times were back in the 60s and early 70s. Edmonton

had no pro sports teams with mega paycheck superstars. It only had modestly paid Eskimo footballers. It was tough for a working guy to get a decent job, buy a car, house, and raise a family. Of course the 80s brought sudden prosperity to the rescue, and in one decade, we got the Oilers, Trappers, and Drillers. Do you remember your wallet fattening as they started pumping all that money into the local economy?

But there is evidence of pro sports teams and/or spectacles taking money out of our pockets. Someone who rents out office spaces in a downtown highrise is among those who recently put up cash to keep the Oilers here. It's not fantasy to assume he may have pushed his financial limits to do so. Won't his "oil bill" influence the rent he charges to a tenant like a dentist for example? How could that not affect what the dentist charges you for your next filling? Another contributor is (or was) the owner of a few local gas bar/convenience store establishments.

I remember him justifying his hockey expenditure with some "spoken from a manual" reasoning about

how the Oilers "make us feel good about our community". I'd dare say that his near minimum wage cashiers and pump jockeys would have felt a damn sight better about their community, had he used that money to pay them a decent living wage instead.

It's always struck me as incredibly perverse, to see low to middle income people being the most mindless worshippers of the pro sports "hype machine". It proportionately sucks more money out of their pockets than any income bracket. For the first time, I'm seeing many of them wise up. Change like that makes me feel we are progressing.

Ed Frey Edmonton

### Discovers March issue

I'd like to say how much I enjoyed my first read-over of your magazine, the March 1999 issue, specifically the articles on social union and "Poverty Meets Globalisation" series. Well done! I'm looking forward to your 5th anniversary issue to catch up on everything I've missed!

Chris Buyze Edmonton



# Free Speech for who?

It's been about a month now, since Ralph Klein wrote a letter to the president of the University of Alberta condemning the work of the Parkland Institute.

The Parkland Institute hosted a conference examining the realities of poverty in our wealthy society. (See article page 6).

At the conference I heard the voices of people from all realms of the socio-economic scale talking about why poverty remains so persistent. It was very positive and oriented to opening discussion to look for solutions.

Indeed, there were a lot of people with bad things to say about the current state of affairs in Alberta. This is no surprise. There are many people who live in poverty and for the life of them they can't get a leg up on the problems they face day to day. This is a problem that needs attention. Most people will not deny it, but whether they choose to believe it's as serious as it really is, is another question. Ralph Klein's letter was intended to down-play the seriousness of the issues of poverty.

Just as we here at **Our Voice** do, our Premier knows that poverty is a big problem. The only difference is that we're trying to expose the truth behind it and he's trying to hide it.

The Premier's letter was a diversionary strategy to take the focus off the core issues being discussed at the conference and to spin the attention in the mainstream media toward his defence of the generosity of Albertans. So again he looks like a hero, defending the honour of the people of this province.

It was the conference's keynote speaker, Armine Yalnizyan, an economist from the Centre for Social Justice in Toronto, that Klein chose to take the most offence to. He called her an outsider. She had repeated a phrase - "Albertans suffer from a lottery mentality," - from a caller on a radio phone-in show in Calgary. He claimed she was besmirching the good name of Alberta.

Sticks and stones Ralph, but can you really deny that poverty is a serious problem in Alberta?

Do we suffer from a lottery mentality? Maybe this a question we all need to ask ourselves. Are we more concerned with what we get than what we give, as we all chase the *Alberta Advantage*, (A.K.A. the American dream)?

The generosity of Albertans was not in question at the conference. It was quite the contrary. We all realise that people, once they are aware of the realities, are generous and do not readily accept that so many of our brothers and sisters live in terrible poverty. However, if our leaders continue to pretend that these problems don't exist and ignore and contribute to the plight of disadvantaged citizens, how can we expect that any citizens will see a need to offer their much needed human support?

Our government often boasts the lowest level of poverty in the country. I wonder how impressed all those tens of thousands of impoverished Albertans are with hearing them say this? How do they feel about poverty? Does this government truly listen to what the poor have to say?

Measuring by Klein's letter, they don't. It was an attempt to stifle the voice of the poor in this province along with the people who are seeking solutions to the problems of poverty.

For five years now, **Our Voice** has examined the issues of poverty in our communities and has given a voice to the poor in Alberta. Yet, as we strive primarily to be a vehicle of communication for people who live in poverty, we also allow all members of society to have their voices heard. In June of 1998 we gave the Premier the chance to answer some very serious questions asked by people living on the streets. We put Premier Klein's voice on our brown recycled paper for our readers to see.

We all have the right to free speech in Alberta. I have, the Premier has, everyone has. The leader of an elected government must realise the importance of this and that it is his absolute duty to empower all citizens to speak freely and loudly when they feel justice in any form has been taken from their lives.

That is democracy and is the only road to the truth.

Michael Walters

Editorial OPINION

**Our Voice** the spare change magazine

## Some lessons in respect

After five years with **Our Voice**, and on the occasion of our fifth anniversary, it is time for me to move on. It's been a great run for me, personally, with **Our Voice** and I have learned a great deal. Perhaps the most important thing I'm taking away is respect. The people who sell this magazine on the street are an amazing example of indomitable human spirit.

Many people I have met have taken incredible blows, and risen again to move forward and make their lives better.

Taking the step to go on the street and sell a magazine on a corner to make ends meet takes courage. When I first went out to experience selling the magazine, I thought I could make a few dollars and have some lunch, eat out. A couple of cold and lonely hours later, I had to think again. This is not an easy job, not a fast buck.

But there are many people who, day after day, rise, go out to work and sell the magazine. Some of them have done this for years. They do not have many other alternatives and they do it. They survive.

I hope I have assisted them, not only to earn some money but also to keep their dignity. We have published many people's stories in this magazine. The strength of their stories, and their lives, is the true value of **Our Voice**.

I will say again that I am hoping for the day when **Our Voice** is no longer needed, when people do not have to sell a magazine on the street. It will be a happy day. Until then, I trust **Our Voice** will be there to help, and to tell the stories of people who are living and surviving.

Keith Wiley

## Flat taxes that smooth out the bumps?

Since people began trading and the first coins were minted, the human economy has been a tool for us to better our lives. It has been a road of progress, as we have steadily built and grown wealthier and wealthier. But how well that economy is working for us now is certainly in question.

At **Our Voice** we are keenly aware that not everyone is benefiting. Not everyone has been invited to the party of progress. This came out clearly at the recent Poverty Amidst Plenty conference in Edmonton, which thoroughly discussed the rapidly increasing disparity in Canada and Alberta. More and more people are being left at the bottom, just as some are getting fabulously wealthy at the top.

The suggestion that Alberta is uncharitable and ignoring this growing suffering and gulf in our society seems to have touched a tender spot for our Premier. It was quite an irony, then, when the week after the Premier's outburst, his government announced in the budget the proposal for the Flat Tax. This change would be a huge gift to the very wealthiest at the top, who stand to have thousands of more dollars in their already well-lined pockets.

Certainly, we can't argue that cutting taxes for the lowest income Albertans is anything but good. It's a bit ridiculous to have people earning well below the poverty line paying taxes. But the real gift is the thousands of dollars given to people over \$100,000 in income. Everybody in between picks up the tab.

Taxation has been one key way to spread wealth around in our society. People contribute more according to their incomes, and the taxes pay for the hospitals, schools, roads and social services, that serve everyone. Progressive taxes help as an equalizer in an economy that's running rampant toward making the rich richer and the poor poorer. The Flat Tax gift to the wealthy goes the other way.

Keith Wiley



Unbiased Media coverage the way Klein sees it...



# Getting the rich and the poor talking... to each other

**S**O WHY IS THERE IS SO MUCH POVERTY in a province with so much economic prosperity? "Economics is simply a reflection of how we value each other and often we value the elite more than anyone else," Armine Yalnizyan, a economist from the Centre for Social Justice in Toronto, told the recent Poverty Amidst Plenty conference held in Edmonton.

"Alberta has soared in leading the way toward economic inequality," she said. She was making reference to a recent report completed by two University of Lethbridge professors. "In Canada in the past twenty years the gap has pushed the rich and the poor so far apart from each other that they aren't hearing each other anymore. They have to talk, they have to listen to each other. There has to be discussion."

"The story has gotten to be that Albertans are uncaring (toward the poor), but I think Albertans do care," says Bill Moore-Kilgannon, Executive Director of the Parkland Institute that organized the conference. "Unless people come together from all different sectors of society and discuss these issues nothing will change. It's not completely the government's problem, it's all of our problem. If people do not talk about these issues, whether they're politicians or business people, or talk about with their friends, it's out of sight out of mind. It was a public policy forum where people came together to talk about these issues."

It will take a lot more than the rich talking to the poor to solve these problems, according to several speakers at the conference.

"Governments and big business know there are lots of poor people out there and they know they're the ones who put them there. The government threw people off welfare and business tried to pick them up with terribly low paying jobs," claimed one single mother of three children who attended the conference on a sponsorship. She refused to give her name for fear that her social worker would read her comments and she would be cut off assistance.

Her thoughts were echoed by many others.

"A lot of welfare reforms are not about employment, they're about labour market strategies," said Brian Bechtel, director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council. He spoke on the restructuring of Alberta's social safety net.

Duncan Cameron, President of the Canadian Centre for Policy Studies agreed. "Welfare cuts took place to push people into the cheap labour market. It means

more profit for the rich," he told a large crowd in his address to the conference, "our modern idea of economics is to avoid work, and to make people work for you and you pay them as little as possible and you get rich."

"People are poor because public policy has created poverty, sometimes the policies dripped with good intentions, but were not thought out," said Jim Green, founder of the Four Corners bank in East Hastings in Vancouver. Green spoke about the importance of putting the power and control back in the hands of poor people. He referred to empowerment instead of charity. Green's Four Corner bank is an institution designed and operated by and for low-income people in Vancouver's eastside. He is also the founder of what is now a ten million dollar housing co-operative that was designed, built and operated by people in that low-income community.

"The people were worried at first that they wouldn't be able to handle budgeting such an expensive project, that they didn't have the budgeting skills, but I told them that you guys are surviving on \$500 a month so you must know how to budget better than anyone else," said Green.

Bob Blair, chair emeritus of Calgary's Nova Corporation, spoke on the connection between poverty and wealth. Before the conference he told Edmonton's See Magazine that "the rich have a responsibility toward improving life in the larger community. A population that rewards some people richly, who then use that reward to look after only themselves has a serious problem."

The moderator of the United Church of Canada, Reverend Bill Phipps delivered a poignant speech on the closing day of the conference. "The free market has become God," he said, "and as a result social policy is deliberately creating an underclass."

He offered some solutions, "firstly we need to have imaginative outrageous fun, we need full housing, we need a shift in attitudes toward the poor, we need a government with a heart, we need full employment."

Yalnizyan had also elaborated on the concept of full employment, when she referred to the words of Jesse Jackson, who said "slavery was full employment". She added that "people need to be paid a decent living wage... when employed."

Gary Trudel, who has lived most of his life off and on the streets across Canada, was a very visible and realistic element at the conference. He explained that he has suffered with mental illness most of his life. "I can't hold down a steady job because I can't get therapy," he said, "but if I robbed a bank or murdered someone and went to jail then I'd have better access to treatment." And it was Trudel who reminded the conference: "In all these things we are talking about, we always have to remember the people. This is what it's about." ♦



## Report on the Poverty Amidst Plenty conference

by Michael Walters

## The invisible people factor

"There is the invisible factor. Where are the people who have been pushed off the social safety net," asked Theresa MacBryan. Theresa was cut off of social services back in 1995 and now sells *Our Voice* to make ends meet. She spoke at the Poverty Amidst Plenty conference hosted by the Parkland Institute early in March. "They are still out there, but they're not on the electronic map. They are invisible people and lots of people just don't care about them."

Roger is one of these invisible people. He thinks most people don't know about him.

Every night as our city turns away from the sun and the multi-million dollar corporate towers are left to illuminate Edmonton's downtown, Roger seeks his shelter.

"I've got a few friends that kindly take me in at times during the winter, or else if I'm lucky I can get in a shelter, but early in January it had to be thirty of forty below and I slept in an underground parking lot. I figured it was my last night here on Earth. In my mind I said all my good-byes to everyone I'd ever met and waited to say hello to God. But someone found

me and I spent the next few days in a warm hospital bed with hypothermia," said Roger. "Usually in the summer it ain't bad, but in the winter it's a near death experience every night you're on the street. I've slept in apartment doorways, behind buildings with those big external heat registers, but in this city you can't really avoid the cold unless you're sealed all cozy inside."

"Sometimes when I'm standing downtown and I see people drive by in a nice car and nice suits, I wonder how they ended up like that and I ended up like this," Roger adds. "I have never done anything wrong or hurt anyone. I've tried to be decent." ♦



**INTERVIEW  
AND PHOTOS  
BY DALE  
LADOUCEUR**

# LANCE MARTY

## Triumphing over Adversity Getting off the streets

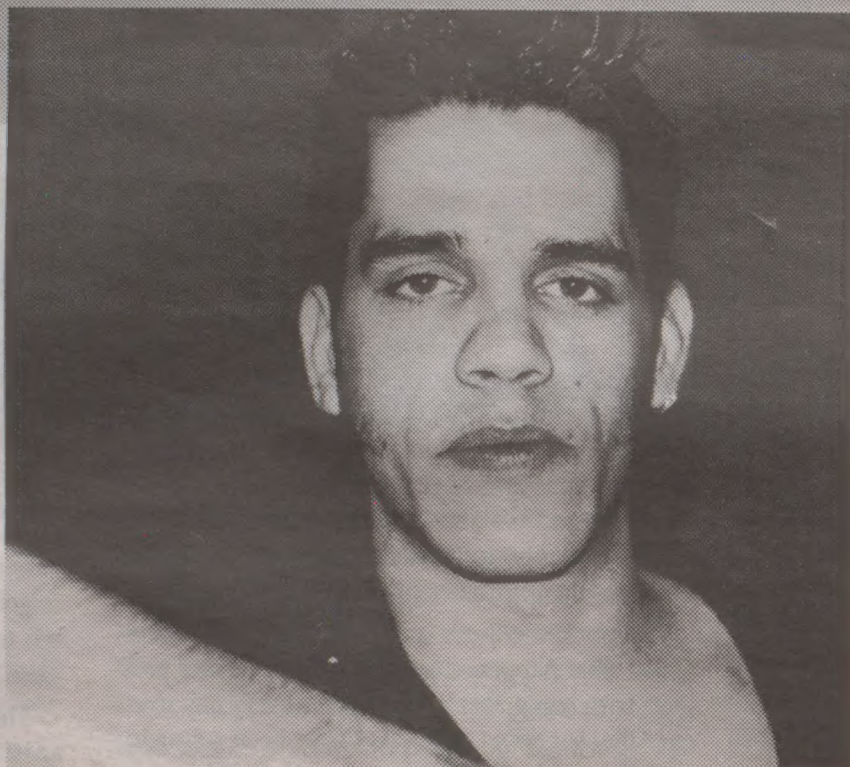
I had the honour of meeting Lance Marty during the Poverty Amidst Plenty Conference. The Inner City Youth Development Association gave a dramatic presentation based on life experiences. The conference also viewed a documentary video "Beating The Streets", in which Marty and a few Inner City High School mates shared their lives with the camera.

The story in the film and the one Marty shared were nothing short of powerful. He was articulate, intelligent and gentle and when he spoke of his true passion, helping others, his enthusiasm was infectious.

"I think I've always known, (about wanting to help others), but it was kind of like being stuck and I couldn't do anything to get out. At least I thought I couldn't. I've been in group homes and foster homes all my life from the time I was three years old up until the age of ten when I finally met my mother. In foster homes there are a lot of bad goings-on and bad kids - I don't like to use that word. Kids that will do anything, punch walls, steal, and I always knew that's not right. I can't do that, I have to stay away from that. When I met my mom at ten I didn't like what she was doing, ya know she was a junkie from the time she was twelve years old up until the day she died. She used to get my brother and myself to help her with her little scams. We were double-doctoring for a while, at one point I was using four different aliases, going to four different doctors getting pills so that we could sell them."

"My mom treated us more as business partners than her children. She would give us a cut of the money whenever she sold the pills. To grow up with that from the age of ten until I was 14, I always knew it was wrong, but there was nothing I felt that I could do about it."

Lance talked about him and his brother standing in front of the York Hotel from about 8:30 pm until about 4:00 am. He described himself as 'Mr Gangster' with a beeper, going to school with \$1500 in his pocket. His voice lowered when he recalled feeling deeply troubled by having to do this, "I never really liked doing it and I was always



gone!"

Lance had nowhere to go and had nothing but the clothes on his back, it was the middle of February. "A friend of mine in the Beverly area lived close to a wrecking yard, it was a few blocks away from his house and he used to sneak me blankets and pillows and stuff (smiles). I was sleeping in a couple of abandoned cars for a long time. One of my friends said 'ya know, Joe (Cloutier) has a house where he lets people stay.' I remembered Joe and Joe ended up remembering who I was. I was filthy and hadn't eaten in a couple of days. I said to him 'look, I don't have a place to stay, I'm on the streets right now. I have friends that are in your drama group and that live in your house. I would really like it if I could have a place to stay, just for a little while so I can get on my feet.' A little while ended up being four years." The Inner City High School allows kids to look past a place to stay and needing food so they can address the bigger issues facing them.

really scared."

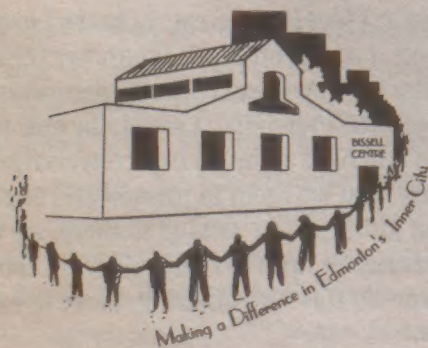
Having the courage to change the direction your life is heading is difficult at any age, let alone 14. "The initial step I saw was when my brother left home when he was 13. He just got fed up with it and said 'I can't handle this'. When I saw him move out I thought ok, he's my big brother, I've looked up to him all my life, he took care of me. In all the foster homes he was there for me, he was the one

taking care of me and sticking up for me. He's only eighteen months older than me. When I saw him leave home I knew that if it ever came down to it, I could do it, I knew in my heart that I could do it."

So Lance made a deal with his mother. "I said 'Mom if you go to jail again, I'll leave home, if you pull a knife on me I'll leave home, and if you do drugs again I'll leave home.' So she stayed clean for about six months and about a month later I got a call from her. She was high, she was in jail needing me to bail her out. So she told me where the money was and I went down there and bailed her out. When we got home we started arguing and she pulled a knife on me. So she did all three things that I asked her not to do in one night. I just said, ok screw this. I'm

continued on page 8

### The Staff and Volunteers of Bissell Centre



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on the Newspaper's 5th Anniversary

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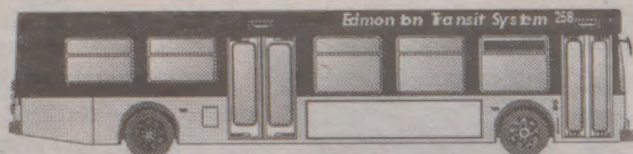
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## POVERTY IN ACTION

Hello  
My name is  
Gary Trudel

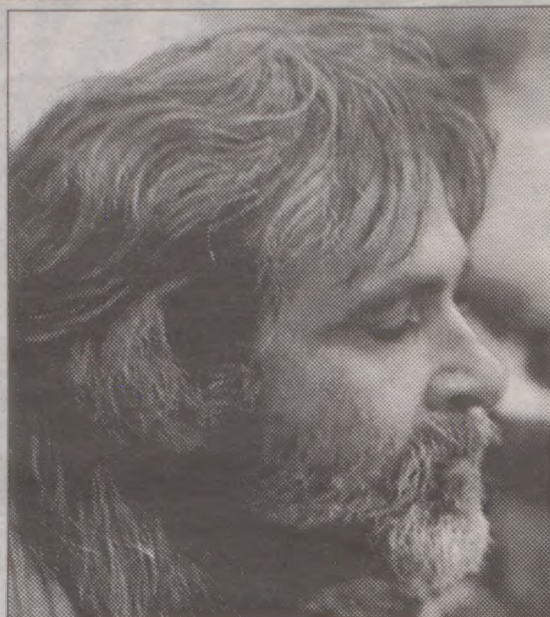
I am writing an article about  
the lack of services and pro-  
grams for me in Alberta. I have  
been trying to figure out how to  
do the article. I thought about  
my life and the trouble I've had  
getting help for myself.

I am diagnosed with Post  
Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This stems from a  
period in my life when, due to being addicted to  
drugs at the age of 11-13, I found myself involved  
in a cult that used extreme violence and sexual  
abuse to control me and my actions. I was involved  
in (against my will) and witnessed the deaths of  
others. I was also tortured in every way possible;  
emotionally, spiritually, physically and sexually.

Twenty-seven years later I still have nightmares  
about what happened and have a great many prob-  
lems with being able to handle the every day stress-  
es of life. For about ten years I have been trying to  
get help and have been stumped, never being able  
to get the help I need.

There is a real lack of qualified support and  
knowledgeable therapists that deal with ritual  
abuse. The climate in this province is not prime for  
getting help. With the mentality of the present gov-  
ernment, they will pay hundreds of dollars for med-  
ications but refuse to pay a small sum for therapy. I  
could receive good therapy for about \$90 a month  
but the government won't cover it. If I were to take  
the medications the costs would be up to \$150 per  
month or more. The different programs that I could  
take as well, won't take me because of cutbacks.

A few years ago I tried to see about taking an  
anger management course at Forensic Assessment  
and Community Treatment Services (F.A.C.T.S.), but  
they told me that because I was not in the justice



system I did not meet  
the requirements for  
the programs they  
offered. At one time if  
you had a record and  
weren't in the system  
you could get the  
help you needed. So  
about three years later  
I was in a bad state. I  
was in a fight and was  
charged with assault. I  
was then able to take  
the anger manage-  
ment course.

There were a lot of  
avenues open that I  
could not pursue due

to lack of funds. I discovered there were programs  
offered to inmates in jail that would have been a  
great benefit to me. I considered doing something  
illegal in order to go to jail to access the programs I  
felt I needed. It is a crime to be in the position of  
thinking that way. Child molesters and rapists have  
better programs than I am able to access. Do I have  
to get to the point where I am potentially danger-  
ous to the community at large before I qualify to  
have my needs met?

The agencies' explanations for my being denied  
assistance are numerous. I am not a war veteran,  
not an immigrant, not the right age, not in the jus-  
tice system, I could participate if I don't mention  
the abuse and they fear my violence. The list goes  
on and on. The treatment I need is the same treat-  
ment that veterans of war need. Why then is it so  
hard for me to find treatment for myself?

I am a satanic ritual abuse survivor. People tend  
to think that there is a difference between that and  
a war vet. I am grateful to my psychiatrist at the  
hospital, but there are some kinds of therapy she  
can't do.

I really have a stressful time dealing with my life.  
I wish I could work hard, but I have many road-  
blocks. If given the opportunity I could be a tax  
paying citizen. How do I get from here to there?  
That's the big question! ♦

## LANCE MARTY Triumphant

continued...

"I always knew that I was going to be a police  
officer," explains Marty, "but then after I graduated  
from the Inner City High School Joe gave me the  
job as the youth worker. He said 'would you like to  
stay on? You could continue to do what you do'.  
People used to come to me even when I was just a  
student there, they would come and talk to me and  
I'd help them out."

My father passed away at 10 and my mother at  
15. So it's basically just me and my brother right  
now. Joe's taken the role as my father, I respect him  
more than I respect any individual on this planet.  
He picked me up off the streets when I was just this  
young little juvenile delinquent and turned me into  
the man that I am today. I owe my whole life to  
him because if I had never met him or heard about  
his organisation, I don't know... and that's the hon-  
est to God truth."

"I love it, I love it, it's great, ya know I love help-  
ing people. I stayed on as the youth worker and I've  
been there for three years. My real passion is help-  
ing people, the individual. I love to be able to just  
sit down and have a one on one conversation with  
somebody. You see them in turmoil and anguish  
and then just from me talking to them, see them  
build themselves up. They walk away thinking, 'he's  
right, I can do this' - it's amazing, I love it, I love it  
ya know."

Lance Marty has an indomitable spirit, an abun-  
dance of empathy and a great need to care for oth-  
ers. "I prefer to be a social worker because youth  
workers are just that. I can do as many things as I  
possibly can, I can be working with children,  
adults, the handicapped or the elderly and that's  
what I love to do, just help as many people as I pos-  
sibly can." ♦





# Fighting the Odds

NEW  
FICTION  
PART THREE

*In last month's installment, the Morrissey family was in a desperate situation with Kenny out of work again. Hope decided she must get a job, for her own peace of mind if nothing else. In spite of her lack of experience, she was hired by a local bookstore. This impressed her husband for a while, until his old jealousy came back. When he got mean again, however, Hope found her feelings for him had changed.*

**By Allison Kydd**

**F**or Hope, the hardest thing of all was the day she knew she didn't love her husband anymore. It was bad enough that Kenny had always spent money without asking and that he couldn't seem to keep a job long enough for her to stop worrying. And of course the times he hit her or promised to "teach [her] a lesson" were pretty horrible; she'd sometimes wished she could just die on the spot.

But those times had passed, and she'd survived. And when he was sweet again, she forgave him and tried to be more loving. After all, she told herself, maybe it was her fault. Maybe she did give him too much heartache by her careless ways, when he was doing the best he could. She tried to be especially nice after she got the bookstore job against his wishes. But still the day came when she knew she couldn't fake it anymore. Once the feeling was gone, she couldn't get it back.

What was worse, she couldn't hide the change, for the lack of love seemed to affect everything. Habits she'd found sexy or endearing about him became unbearable. She even found fault with the way he talked, the way he called her "the wife" and never said "please" and "thank you". And then there were his other habits, like sitting around the living-room without his shirt on or not remembering to close the bathroom door when he went to have a pee.

And she found she had this thing about smell. Once she'd liked the dusty man smell of Kenny's work clothes. It had made her feel safe and cared for. Now if she caught as much as a whiff of perspiration off him, she'd want to gag. She noticed the dirt under his fingernails too and used it as an excuse not to let him touch her. And neither did

she welcome his touch when he was fresh and soapy-smelling from the shower, though once she'd have twined her arms around him and nuzzled her face into his neck. Now, from the moment he came home each day she could hardly wait for him to leave again.

Her sweetest times, after she knew she didn't love him anymore and before he left for good, were when Kenny was gone for the evening and she was alone with the children. They had their bedtime ritual. Gareth, though the oldest, always tired first. Margie, who was seven, and especially Shelagh, maybe because she was the baby and got away with just about everything, were much harder to settle. Inevitably Hope would have to leave the girls with their light still on and their beds piled high with books and dolls so she could say good-night to Gareth before he fell asleep. He'd turn towards her and purse his lips, but his eyes would be closed and his head already so groggy that his kisses landed in mid-air.

The nights Kenny didn't go out with friends, Hope found reasons to stay up late. A lot of the time she'd fall asleep over a book or in front of the television. Other nights, when she finally went upstairs and slipped between the rumpled sheets, she'd turn her back on her husband and hug close to her edge of the bed. When she dared, she'd ignore his arms if he reached for her. After a while he seemed to give up reaching for her.

So, it finally didn't make much difference if he was trying to be good to her or not. And she didn't blame him when he found someone else to sleep with; in fact, she was relieved. She didn't ask for the details. Maybe he'd have a reason to be gone for good now, and then maybe she could start forgiving herself.

The trouble was, after the first relief and excitement of his leaving, things immediately started piling up on Hope as if she didn't have the right to be happy. First, there were the kids to deal with. She'd planned so carefully how she would tell them their father was gone. She made a special meal of fried chicken and chips, and put on her best dress.

But Gareth came home from school that first day with a scowl that said "Back off" and bounded

upstairs to his room. Shelagh was bawling, saying Margie hadn't waited for her, and Margie started in with "Why does it always have to be me? Gareth should take turns. When'll I ever get to go to other kids' houses after school? Everybody else does."

Then Shelagh said, "Where's Da?", and Hope was caught by surprise and didn't know where to start, so she said, "Go wash up, and supper'll be ready soon. There's dessert." That was usually enough to pacify everybody.

This time, however, even Shelagh was uncooperative.

"It's not time for supper; I wanna play some more!" she shouted, adding recklessly. "Don't like dessert!"

That kind of behaviour meant, of course, that both the girls had to be sent to their room, since Margie immediately called her little sister a liar. Hope very quickly saw that the evening of quiet talk with the children, the planning of their new life together, wasn't going to happen. In fact, she gave up the whole idea.

For the next couple of weeks she dealt with questions only as they came up, tolerated the sulks and tried to be understanding. She resented it, however. How could the children have stopped being on her side suddenly? They actually missed their dad and treated her like she was the enemy. It was all bloody unfair, considering that he'd never been much of a father to them at the best of times.

Sometimes Hope was tempted to tell her children about all the bad things she'd had to live with for their sakes. She knew, however, that she mustn't tell, even if they could understand. If they didn't know, or maybe did know but had managed to forget what they'd heard and seen, how could she remind them? Any why would they believe her anyway, after all those years of hiding it, not wanting to scare them, wanting to forget the bad things herself?

Still, she was surprised and, yes, a little hurt that they still loved him. As if they'd betrayed her by doing so. God, it was all so confusing.

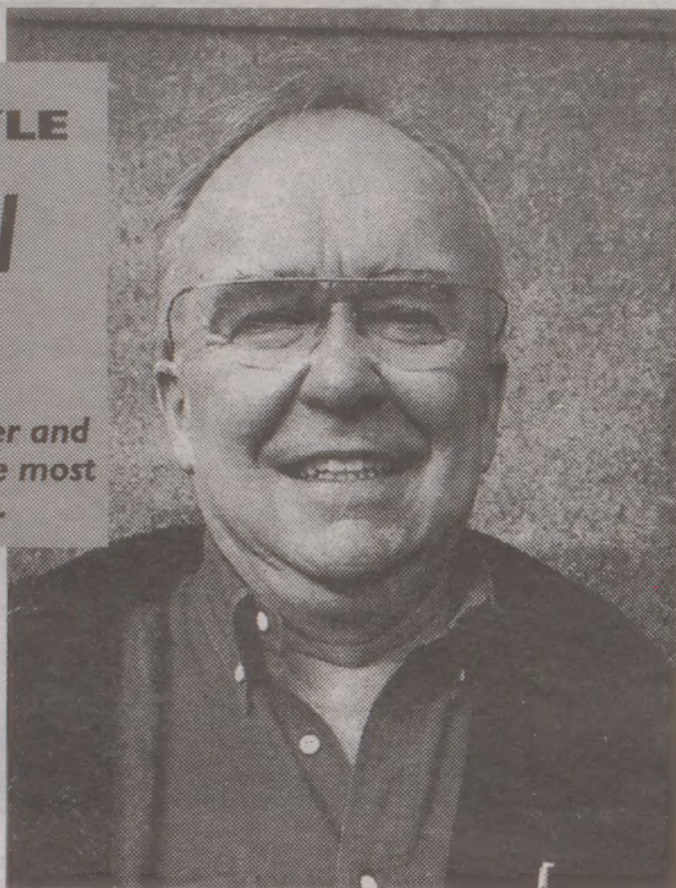
*to be continued.*



## JOHN'S STYLE FILE

# Michael Phair

John Zapantis  
**Our Voice** vendor, writer and  
photographer meets the most  
interesting people.



**M**ichael Phair is an outspoken and prominent Edmonton city councillor. He is admired for his productiveness and diversity by fellow members on the Edmonton City council.

Michael's contributions as a moral advocate toward the enhancement of public programs, has earned the loyal third term councillor a rightful place as a political representative in our community.

Michael, the former chairperson of the Social Planning Council, was first elected as a councillor in 1992.

Michael is a strong moral advocate of low cost, subsidised housing for people living in poverty.

The experienced and committed councillor hopes to reach this primary mandate before the end of his third term.

"What I would like to achieve is that we come up with a pro-active housing policy, low cost housing and social housing for residents of the city. That's what needs to be done with the provincial and the federal government. It's really important for the city to play an active role and take some initiative in this area," he says.

One of the many successful programs that Michael Phair is very pleased to have been a key

player in, is the introduction of the inner city school hot lunch program. The innovative program was approved by city council in 1993.

**Our Voice** asked Michael Phair, what advice he would give someone who may have thoughts about one day becoming a politician?

"Go for it. It can be an interesting and exciting career. It's certainly challenging. I can guarantee that you'll learn a great deal if you decide to become a politician."

If you have concerns about the issues that affect the way you live and need the moral support of Michael Phair please contact his office at 496-8146 or email him at phair@gov.edmonton.ab.ca or fax him at 496-8113. ♦

## Next month in **Our Voice** the spare change magazine

Children and their stories of poverty.

Special 8 page insert of the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation.

Part 2 of our conversation with Michael Moore and a closer look at the Awful Truth.

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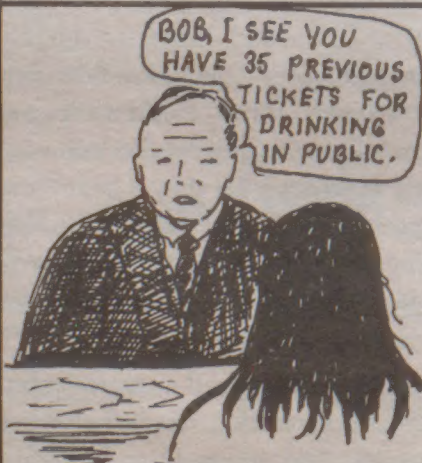
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## SOUPLINE BOB

by Linda Dumont





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THE CITY OF  
**Edmonton**

IN EDMONTON

# Churchill Wahweaye

BY JOHN ZAPANTIS

Churchill is known as one of the most humble and most admired *Our Voice* vendors by fellow vendors and *Our Voice* customers.

The seasoned *Our Voice* veteran originally started vending the magazine while living in Calgary back in May of 1994.

Five months later Churchill made his inevitable residency in Edmonton and continued to sell the magazine here.

Our laid back vendor seems to be generally recognised by that seemingly lifetime consistent smile.

Churchill treats *Our Voice* as a social event as well as an occupation.

"I come here for the people, the friends that come and talk to me and take me for coffee. It's supposed to be a coffee break, but sometimes it lasts for a couple of hours."

*Our Voice* helps Churchill supplement his income.

"Well it's to subsidise my expenses because after I pay for all my bills, I don't have much left," he says.

The smiling Churchill may be found

Churchill with one of his regular customers, Linda.

at his favourite and only corner in front of Grabba Jabba at 104 Street and Whyte Avenue in Edmonton. ♦

**VENDOR**  
Profile

EVERY  
Authorized vendor  
has a **BADGE!**

**Our**  
**Voice**



**V**  
**E**  
**N**  
**D**  
**O**  
**R**

Vendor Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized by \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR VOICE VENDOR'S CODE

- I will be sober at all times while working.
- I will be polite to all members of the public.
- I will vend only in areas that are authorised.

## CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

### Kathy Albert

Kathy Albert is the mother of three children. In May of 1997, she and four other women started up the South Edmonton Distribution Foundation in Kathy's home. Seven days a week they pick up bread, pastries and produce from two IGA stores. They then take the food to five depots, three in Millwoods, one in the west-end and one in the inner city. Families in need receive this free food.

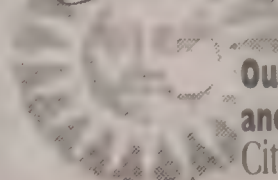
Kathy is also the board secretary of WE-COPE Society, as well as the chairperson of the Sweetgrass

school council, a volunteer director of the Richfield Family Centre and a Parent/Teacher Association member of Grace Martin School. With all the volunteer hours donated by Kathy, she is well deserving of the honour of citizen of the month.

by Cecil Garfin



## Café Mosaics



Our Voice Magazine  
and Café Mosaics'  
Citizen of the Month

EVERY MONTH in *Our Voice*, we will be featuring someone who has gone the extra mile in their lives or in their careers to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

The Citizen of the Month will receive a dinner for two courtesy of the Garneau Cafe' Mosaics on Whyte Avenue.



# 5 years of helping people help themselves

All the little stories add up to a big success.

MICHAEL WALTERS, editor

**H**e told me he needed to get back to Calgary because his little son was sick. His name was Gordon and he was in Edmonton looking for work. He was a welder. Gordon was married and had two little children to feed, but things had hit rock bottom for him in Calgary. He had lost his job, because the company he worked for closed its offices. He looked for another job, but found nothing, so he came to Edmonton. He came with little money and without his family. They waited behind hoping for news of a fresh start in a new city. Gordon exhausted his resources while in Edmonton. He submitted hundreds of resumes and during his time here he spent the last of the family's money. He phoned his wife and told her he wasn't sure how he was going to get back home. He had no money. Then his wife informed him that their youngest son had become ill. He planned to hitchhike back, but according to Gordon, "she wouldn't hear of it. It's dangerous." He tried to get money from various emergency service organisations, but nothing worked for him. This is when he came to **Our Voice**. It was early in 1996.

I had only been working for **Our Voice** for a few months up to this point and had already heard countless stories like Gordon's; stories where the wheels had fallen off of people's lives and they found themselves trapped without any money to survive. But Gordon's is one story I'll probably never forget.

He came into my office and told me his story. He needed money and he'd heard that people were selling a newspaper to make some.

Usually, however, we require that people wanting to sell **Our Voice** have \$3.50 if they want to get started. Then we match that amount in credit. That gives the vendor ten papers to get going on. It's a small initial investment and part of the entrepreneurial element of **Our Voice**. But Gordon didn't have a cent and his situation was something that simply couldn't be thrown aside because of a lack of \$3.50. My gut feeling told me to let it slide, to give him papers on full credit. After all, when it came down to it, it was only seven bucks.

Gordon came back later that day with enough money to buy twenty or thirty more papers and he paid off half of what he owed. The next morning he was back in my office. He had a bus ticket in his hand and was on his way back to Calgary to be with his family. He also paid off the rest of what he owed **Our Voice**. I was pleased things worked out for him.

A few months later when I was out having dinner with some friends a man approached me in the restaurant. I knew I'd seen him before, but couldn't recall where. He reintroduced himself as Gordon, someone who had sold **Our Voice** for a couple of days a few months before. Then I remembered his story.

He went on to tell me the happy ending. After being back in Calgary for a couple of weeks and using the food bank to get by, he got a call from one of the places that he'd applied to in Edmonton. They wanted to hire him. So he scrounged up a small amount of money to get to Edmonton. His new company provided temporary housing for him and his family until they got started and things worked out great. The job was going well and his family was happy.

That day in that restaurant, Gordon took the time to show his gratitude for what **Our Voice** had done for him. He expressed to me his appreciation of our support when little else was available to him. I took that to heart and it meant a lot. We had made that little difference in someone's life and that's what we aim for.

Gordon's story is one of the hundreds of success stories boasted by **Our Voice** and I would like to pass along the thanks and appreciation of Gordon to those people, whoever you may be, who bought papers from him back in 1996. Your support of our vendors and the project really does make a healthy difference in people's lives.

Spare Change arose early in 1994 as a response to vicious cuts to the province's social service supports.



Tens of thousands of Albertans were dumped from income assistance and many of them had nowhere else to turn. They were left with no means to support themselves or their families. Studies show that few of them found adequate employment and many ended up destitute and homeless. **Our Voice** wanted to put people back in control of their lives.

In the five years that **Our Voice** has existed we have helped thousands of western Canadians meet some very important needs. We weren't able to help everyone who came through our doors. Sometimes **Our Voice** was not the best option, but in most cases it was.

By no means are the people who vend **Our Voice** a homogenous group of people. There are many people who have sold **Our Voice** for many different reasons. There are those who simply use **Our Voice** as a means to an economic gain. They are people, like Gordon, who have found themselves without work, without any way to support themselves or their families and **Our Voice** has provided for them the support they needed to regain more mainstream and steady employment. For some this took only a few days and for others it took much longer.

For some folks **Our Voice** is an income, but perhaps even more importantly it is a community. **Our Voice** is where many people have made their contribution to our world. Not only have they sold the magazine, they have written articles and poetry, taken pictures, advised us on editorial direction and much more. They have shared their stories.

It is where they have made their friends. It is where they share their lives, good or bad and have been able to nurture and develop relationships.

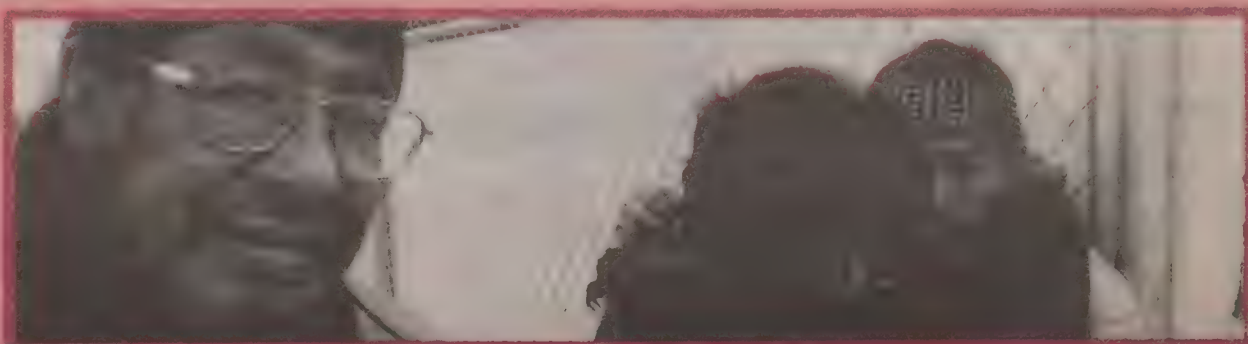
**Our Voice** has attempted to give people who live in poverty renewed confidence and hope. We have encouraged full and complete expression and voice. Many people who sell this magazine feel they are voiceless and unheard by the rest of society. We don't want them to feel that way. We want them to be recognised as important members of our communities, people who, regardless of economic stature, are valued as much as anyone else. The important first step is to allow them to value themselves. People who vend **Our Voice** or who are poor are just as valuable as the CEO of a corporation, the owner of a bagel shop or the Premier of a province.

In the past it has been mentioned that the ultimate goal of **Our Voice** is bankruptcy. This means that we would live in a society where there are enough supports and a fairer distribution of wealth and no one would have to stand on a street corner in minus forty degree weather selling a magazine to survive. It also means that every single person would be valued and listened to when they had something to say.

But as the years have passed and we've seen the vendors who have continued to sell **Our Voice** and the community that has formed, we realise that our ongoing existence is important. Not all people can be successful working in the often rigid labour market. There are people with physical and mental disabilities who sell **Our Voice** and the flexibility it provides allows them to contribute as their health permits. Their contributions are important to them. We also realise that we are part of the process that works toward the goal of providing free speech and expression to all people.

So we shall continue to look for solutions to the problems of poverty and to try to soften the bite that it has on so many people along the way.

Thank you to all of our loyal customers, advertisers and supporters, but the biggest thanks goes out to all those people who have sold **Our Voice**. While working towards your own successes, you have helped the project succeed so it can be there for others. Together we have all made a difference. ♦



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# 5 YEARS ON THE STREET

## 5th Anniversary "Best of" Edition

THE NEXT 12 PAGES ARE  
SELECTED PIECES FROM THE  
FIRST 5 YEARS OF  
OUR VOICE.

THIS EDITION ALSO  
INCLUDES SOME OF THE  
BEST OF PHOTOGRAPHY,  
INCLUDING THE STRIPS ON  
THIS PAGE FROM  
PIETER DE VOS JR.



## Message from the publisher

LARRY DERKACH

At Bissell Centre we offer a variety of services and programs to people who are trying to cope with poverty. As part of a "mission review" of our whole organization, we gathered groups of people who use our services and asked them what direction they would give us. "We want to work!" came out loud and clear.

People want to work. They want to be independent from agencies and government support programs. They want the dignity afforded by economic security that comes by their own hands.

And people want to work even when it seems unrealistic and unachievable. Most vendors experience significant obstacles to ordinary employment- if you are a regular reader, you will have read some of their own stories. To be an Our Voice vendor takes gumption.

That's why Our Voice plays such an important role in our community. It enables people to parlay the asset of personal initiative into a real, if small, employment income. It helps them achieve a measurable degree of dignity and independence.

This fifth anniversary issue marks many achievements. It's not easy to put together a good quality paper on a shoestring budget. It's hard to be a credible voice for vendors as well as a well-balanced read for you. I hope you think we've done reasonably well at these things.

Our Voice is a community effort. Some paid staff are needed to keep it all together, but they work far beyond any reasonable expectations for the modest amount they are paid. In addition, we have been blessed with a host of others who make it work:, including ad sales reps and loyal advertisers, various volunteers and writers, distributing partners in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Calgary until recently, and past managing partners Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation and Calgary Urban Project Society. Special thanks are due to Michael Walters, Keith Wiley and Gord Poschwatta.

Thank-you for buying this paper. More than 1,500 vendors have benefited from this venture since day one. It's your support makes this venture work, and enables people to work. ♦

Larry Derkach is the Executive Director, Bissell Centre.



## The debate about Spare Change

KEITH WILEY

Gord and I had an argument. It went on and on, so I guess it was really a bit of a debate. We had started up this new kind of publication, called Spare Change at the time, what should it be all about? Gord Poschwatta was the project manager and the initiating force behind the new project in 1994. He found and worked with the people who needed to make money by selling it, the vendors. He worked with the inner city agencies and groups who could support the program. And he talked to the businesses and shopping malls, security guards and owners, to persuade them to give vendors a chance to sell. He hired me to edit the new street-sold magazine.

For Gord, it was clear, **Our Voice** was there to help the vendors and the goal was to make it easy to sell on the street, a newspaper of value that people would want to buy. We hammered out a two part mission statement: "...to provide an income opportunity for economically-marginalized people in our society while communicating about their issues to the public." That covered it. Gord wanted a magazine that would be easy to sell. My interest was to have some guts in it, some substance about the problems faced by our vendors and the community, and the causes of those problems. What about the people who live in poverty and are obliged to sell a magazine on a street corner to keep body and soul together?

We tried many different approaches, an astrology column, cartoons, an events calendar, a crossword puzzle and the stories about people struggling to survive. For Gord and I, the argument usually came down to what was on the cover. From my point of view, Gord wanted whatever would sell the magazine, even a sunshine girl on the cover. I didn't think another entertainment fluff publication would make it in a market already filled with this kind of thing. And so the debate raged on. Famous people, recognis-



able faces, shocking stories, empathy-engaging images... we tried them all.

Gord had a very business-like approach to the project, and that included a dictum that every bit of work that went into the publication should be paid for. We paid every writer and photographer, every vendor who submitted a small "word on the street", an honorarium. Usually it was about \$30, which was nothing to sneeze at for many of the vendors and contributors. It also turned out

to be, to our surprise, close to the cutthroat market rate for freelance writing and art.

Whenever possible we published the work of vendors, and of the "inner city" community. It worked out well, the gritty, real-life stories of people facing hardships aren't something you find published everywhere. They can be very strong stories, of heroic struggles, of painful tragedies, and of the human spirit.

And, it turned out, that's what many **Our Voice** buyers liked, and their reason to buy the magazine. But that's not all. We run the risk of being repetitive bad news, and have been accused of "whining." Some of our fellow citizens say, "Oh, I've read that, and I don't want to read more of the same."

Gord Poschwatta put a great deal of himself into **Our Voice**. He had broadened the publication to sales in other cities: Calgary, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, which helped to spread the cost of production and printing over a larger sales base. But it created the dilemma of making a publication relevant on the streets of many different cities.

A year and a half ago, Gord left **Our Voice** to pursue other ventures, and left a legacy of ideals for a project that can really help people.

But the debate about content, about what's most saleable for the vendors, and what's most relevant to their lives, still carries on. The answer of course, as with any such debate, is a blend of approaches, something for everyone. The magazine should be appealing and interesting to new buyers, and to people who have bought before. It can be loyal to the contributors and community which it supports, and include a wide range of upbeat stories. For me that's always been the challenge for this unique publication and I'm sure it will continue. ♦

Keith Wiley

This is Keith Wiley's last issue of **Our Voice** as he is leaving for a new position. He was the editor of **Our Voice** from 1994 to mid-1998 when Michael Walters took over the challenge. Since then Keith has continued helping with editing and doing the design on the publication.



# BRAINWASHED

by File

From the October 1995 Edition

**T**he haunted face of Karla Homolka, her eyes blackened, appeared on the pages of newspapers. Was she a scheming accomplice who turned on Bernardo for the sake of leniency, or was she a brainwashed victim, acting out of fear for her own life and safety? Perhaps she was bit of both.

Her story raised disturbing questions for me. If the man I married had been a perverted killer, would I have covered for him and even helped him to bury the bodies? I like to think I would have been able to pull out from under his influence, but my track record leaves that open to doubt. As a victim of violence I became someone who sold out for the sake of survival, and acted in ways uncharacteristic of my own basic nature.

The cover-ups began with the violence. Why? I have no dear answer. Homolka is said to have claimed she did it for love and out of fear, but these motives still leave a blank area. Certainly I loved my husband or I would not have married him. With that marriage, though, our relationship changed, and I became someone whom he felt he had to control. When the violence began, it was unbelievable, and unacceptable. There was an almost complete denial. This couldn't be happening to me. This was the man I loved. I felt as though it were my fault; as though I had somehow turned him into a monster through some fatal flaw in my own character. He had not acted that way before, but, looking back, had I been more informed the evidence was there.

There was also a fearful, self-protective instinct, reinforced by the viewpoint of others and my own desire not to hurt those who loved me. There was the police officer who came in response to a neighbour's call. He spoke to me as though I were a criminal, even examining my arms for evidence of drug use. I sat in his office next to my husband and said nothing about my injuries.

Instead I tried to tell him who I was, or had been, for somehow I had been devalued. Perhaps had I been seen first in my professional capacity, it would have been different. I was afraid to speak in front of my husband because I had no assurance that they would take him away, and everything and anything could be used against me later.

When I tried to speak to the pastor about what

was happening, I was told that I could confess my own sins, but not those of another person. He wanted to hear nothing about my husband. The church secretary had taken a course at WIN House, a shelter for battered women. She told me flatly that I was a victim because I acted like a victim. I replied that I acted like a victim because I was a victim.

There is always that judgement, often unvoiced, that you must be somehow defective, that unconsciously you asked for it because why else would someone want to abuse you?

Every time there was a violent episode, my husband made me promise not to tell. I was bound by my own promises of silence and carried the dark secrets, sometimes even covering for him with a believable lie, sometimes merely saying nothing at all.

**AS A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE  
I BECAME SOMEONE WHO  
SOLD OUT FOR THE SAKE  
OF SURVIVAL, AND ACTED  
IN WAYS  
UNCHARACTERISTIC OF MY  
OWN BASIC NATURE.**

My son drowned in a bathtub. He was ten months old. The police came. They asked me what happened. I said nothing about my husband. I only told them that I had left the baby unattended in the bathtub and that when I returned, the baby was dead. They took pictures of the bathroom, the nursery and the apartment, and they left. As far as they were concerned, my husband was the wronged and grieving father who had still been in bed when the tragedy occurred. What went unsaid was why the baby was left alone for so long. I had walked into the bedroom to pick up something, and MY husband stopped me from returning to the bathroom even though I told him the child was in the bath.

Somehow he always came out right.

My mother said, 'I'll never forgive you for letting that little baby die.'

I had no answer then, and no defence. I knew better.

A friend phoned and asked me if I knew a babysitter, then hastily added, 'But not you. I wouldn't trust you with my baby.'

She was probably right.

We were foster parents. When my husband became abusive to the little mentally challenged child, I was there and said nothing. When the child's collar bone was broken, I backed up the story; the child had fallen. I had not actually witnessed the incident, but I knew. When the childcare workers and the police came to investigate, by my own silence I was labelled as abusive. As usual my husband was not responsible. He had conveniently gotten a job, something he rarely did.

I guess their evaluation was fair.

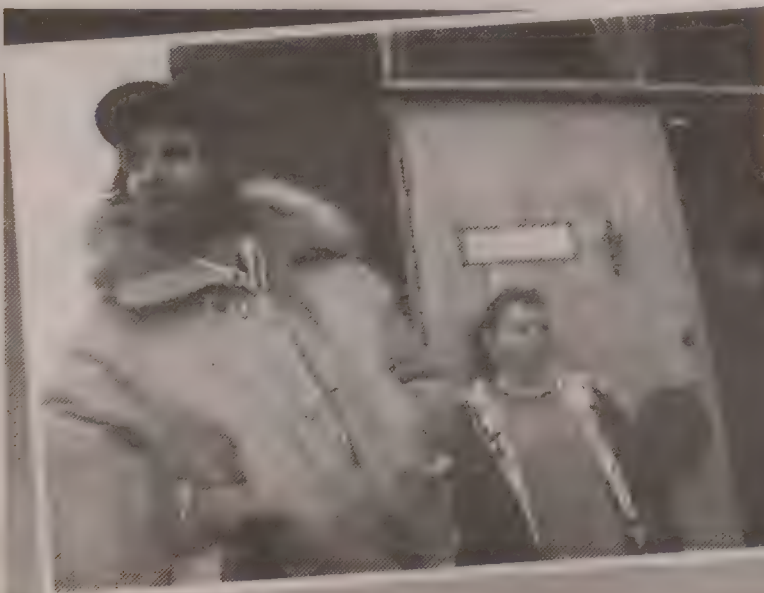
The haunting question remains. Does the term brainwashed account for such blind devotion to an individual who has control over your life? What makes an intelligent and otherwise rational human being allow and even support acts of violence.

The flashbacks are a thing of the past now, but I can remember the blind, unreasoning panic, the frozenness that goes beyond fear, a heart-pounding, unthinking state, knowing he is out there and that no matter what I do, I've had it.

It all adds up to control.

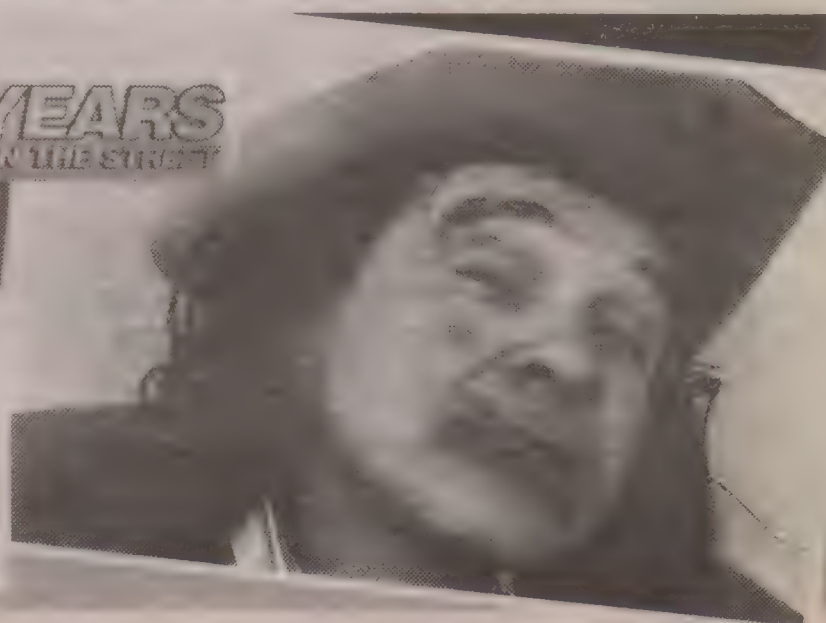
It was not just the acts of violent abuse. It was more insidious than that. There were the constant put-downs, countless undermining small acts like being offered a bite of a sandwich, taking it knowing he would otherwise be angry, and having the food **smashed in my face or having him cut off all of the fat and gristle from a steak, then offering them to me** saying, 'I saved you the best part.' There was the constant criticism of everything I did, said or was, and the feeling of being watched to see what I was doing wrong. Phone calls were overheard so that he could grill me later for a word not flattering to him. There were strings attached to the gifts he gave me. I had to be eternally thankful and make sure to give him all credit if anyone offered a compliment. He had to have credit for things he never even did. If I shovelled the walk while he lay around watching TV I had to say, 'We shovelled the walk', so that he was included in all that I accomplished.

It all added up to denial of myself as a person. I had become a possession, and perhaps that is what brainwashing is about, enslavement. To this day, if I see him and mention any incident from the past, he absolves himself from any responsibility by saying, 'You did it because you wanted to.' Like Hell! ♦



**Our Voice 3 YEARS ON THE STREET**

Two photographs by Pieter de Vos Jr. On the left, Brian and Rose outside the Mustard Seed Street Church. We don't know the identity of the man on the right.







Peter, Chris and Blackhawk were photographed on the street, by Pieter de Vos Jr. The photo appeared in the second volume of the Songs of the Street Poetry Book.

The words "blood clot, brain aneurism, emergency surgery" were all scrambled up inside my head. What the hell does this doctor mean? It can't be true. Sobbing, I turned to look at the 15-year-old girl beside me. Her daughter. The tears flowed and flowed and would not stop as we tried to provide the girl with words of encouragement.

"She has a one percent chance of making it through the surgery," the doctor said.

Damn these fucking doctors anyways. They don't even know who this woman is and what she's lived through. How dare they say that about her. I admired her inner strength and courage, so strong and powerful. If anyone could live through it, she would. A stupid brain aneur... or whatever they call it.

It's wrong, all wrong, this whole scene is wrong. We were all just together this morning, Christmas morning, yes, Christmas morning! We were all laughing. She was the centre of all of our reasons for being there. She was why we all came together to form a family. She was why we all felt accepted, wanted and loved.

She had wanted a shawl for Christmas, "like the ones the fancy ladies wear downtown," she had said. "I see them wearing them when I'm selling the papers," she explained. She opened the present Sonny, her common-law, had given her. She pulled it out of the box, a beautiful, cape-like shawl. The expression on her face said it all: "this is what I wanted!" She leaned over and kissed Sonny, and said "I love you babe," with a big smile.

"I look too rich to be selling papers in this," she laughed, standing in front of the Christmas tree. The words, the picture, keep going through my head, over and over. It does not match, not at all, what her daughter and I are exposed to now.

Just this morning she had been going out to check on the turkey, over to her cousin's down the street. But she never made it, she fell on the steps.

Now they were doing the surgery on Christmas

## A Christmas tragedy Spare Change vendor Dayle

by Heather Stump

Day. Surgery to remove the blood clot that was putting immense pressure on her brain. She made it through the surgery! We knew she would. She's a fighter. She continued to fight through the night. Right on girl! Keep going, we know you will.

The private room off to the side of the intensive care waiting room was full of family. The fatigue and exhaustion were evident on some faces, raw shock on others. The surgeon stood at the front, white coat and stethoscope around his neck. They had to remove an extremely large portion of her brain, he said. She was fully dependent on machines for her life. Cries exploded in different tones around the room. He went on, "Right now, there is a tube draining the fluid from the right side of her brain. It is evident that little pieces of her brain are passing through the tube, with the fluid.

Stop. Shut up, please! I beg you.

He continued to explain but I heard only mumbling. I didn't believe his words, I heard her words, "This is the best Christmas, I've ever had."

On December 26, 1995, Dayle Vitkauskus died. She was born Cordillia Redwood and when she was young they called her "Dilly". At the funeral her sister, who came from North Dakota, spoke, choking on her words... "the last time I saw my sister, it was 20 years ago."

Why? Why do things have to be this way? I

wanted to speak to tell them how hard a life she had had. Tell them what an amazingly strong person she was to have survived the brutality of abusive relationships, life on the streets, and her strength to overcome her addictions. She never gave up, she determinedly picked up the pieces and moved forward. Most importantly, I wanted to tell them how happy she was, how much she had achieved, and how she was succeeding in her dreams and her goals.

The casket at the front of the church held my friend inside. The mother to Candace and Beverly. The mother to many, many of us. This was Sonny Joe's wife, laying in the casket in her Christmas shawl.

The long drive home was filled with so many unanswered questions. There are plain and simple ones. Who will read to Sonny every night? Who will Candace write her poems for, and who will she make desert for on Sundays? Who will Beverly run home from school for, to tell about the boy who likes her?

The house. It was once a home, but now it's empty. The furniture is still here, even her dumpster diving coffee cup, and the fireplace tools she bought at the flea market. I expect to see her walk through the doors with the old orange and white slippers she had from the woman's shelter, and would not get rid of because they had history behind them. The natural nail polish sits on the headboard. I remember complimenting her on her nails, she had laughed, "I can grow them now. Before I had to use them as a defence weapon. This is Sonny's status."

This home had been her dream, she had achieved it. Her happiness and contentedness here can still be felt. ♦

Dayle Vitkauskus was a Spare Change vendor in Edmonton, mother of two teenage daughters. She died last Christmas after a very sudden aneurism. Heather Stump, who worked distributing newspapers to vendors in Edmonton, and was Dayle's friend, wrote this memoir.



# IN MEMORIAM Mary Burlie

by Linda Dumont  
From August 15, 1996 Edition

From the day twenty-five years ago when Mary Burlie first walked into the Boyle Street Community Services Co-op to volunteer, and told Alice Hansen, "You need me, Babe," until the day of her death, Mary was a tireless worker in the cause of the inner City poor.

She was one of the most recognisable champions of the poor in Edmonton, and just weeks before her death on July 13 she was speaking out at the Women's March Against Poverty.

At the Co-op, Mary found her true vocation in life.

At the Co-op everything is '... for the needs of the poor, we do everything we can to help them,' says Gloria, who worked with Mary for fifteen years. "Mary has been my rock, always there for me. She never turned anyone away. She did what she could for them, from hugs to giving them shit."

In a conversation earlier this summer Mary herself simply explained, "You do what you can. I had some knowledge of the people and the community in that area. The Boyle Street Co-op began because they recognised very early that there was a need for housing." Looking back over her career, Mary said, "there have been a lot of things accomplished. None of us have achieved the ultimate. I had high hopes and dreams that people can come together and eliminate some of the pitfalls. We need to educate people as to how valuable they are. Poverty is one of the most dreadful diseases in our society. We have to figure out how we can stop it. That means education. The Co-op has been trying to do that."

Hope Hunter, director of the Co-op, said "Mary's been with the Co-op ever since it started, so in many ways the Co-op, and how it works and what it believes in, is the personification of Mary. I think, certainly for me personally and others who work with her, Mary taught us what it really means to have respect for people and what it really means to be supportive in ways that help people to keep their power and strength. She has taught us about justice and what's fair and what's right."

Mary's work extended far beyond the Co-op and the inner city. She was president of The Black Woman's Association and for eight years was president of Change for Children.

The daughter of an Arkansas sharecropper, she grew up in poverty. As a girl she spent long hours driving the mules in the fields. There were years of deprivation when the crops failed.

She came to Edmonton from Sacramento, California in 1969 with her late husband John and their six children. It was during a period of racial riots over bussing of poor black students, when civil rights were an explosive issue in



California.

The family moved into a rambling house in downtown Edmonton. It became a haven for people. Anyone who needed someone to talk to, a word of encouragement, or a place to stay ended up at Mary's.

In recent years Mary was a well-loved public speaker who welcomed every opportunity to champion the cause of the poor, and to invite others to take up the challenge. "I feel that they must care if they are interested in listening. My whole journey has just been beautiful as far as doing presentations. There are good people out there who are interested and who want to help. We kind of isolate ourselves from each other. We need to come together and ask, 'what can I do?'"

For Mary, there were very clear rewards in her work. "Most people think you can never come out of poverty," she explained, "I say they

can. It's a beautiful feeling to know that you've helped someone to get out of poverty. I remember one of the ladies shortly after I started working. She was a chronic alcoholic who had lost all of her kids. She had five children. She was just devastated. She got into drugs and alcohol. After about a year and a half, she made it. She got her kids back, met and married a guy and moved to Calgary where she went to college and won a scholarship. It took a lot of hard work and begging and pleading, but she made it."

When Mary became ill with cancer she still went to work whenever she was able to. For Mary there was no retirement. She was on sick leave, and the Co-op was very much on her heart.

"I want to get back to work, to get back out there," she said. "I want to know everything. I'm nosey. I miss the people, I miss them so much," she paused, then added, "You never think these people will come forward for you, but they do. Those so-called 'bums' they call them. There's so much compassion. They are asking if there is anything they can do for me."

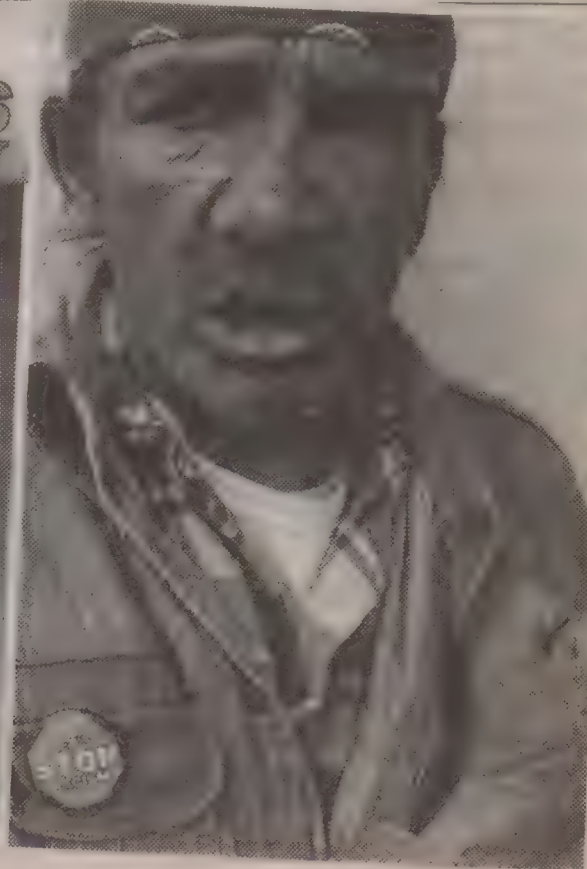
Gifts to the Mary Burlie Memorial Fund can be to the Boyle Street Co-op or to the Food Bank. ♦

"Mary grew up poor, black and female. Her wisdom outshone any academic training. She always said that she learned things no university can teach. She learned how to love without condition. She learned how to use her smile and sharp wit to turn many a tense and hostile situation into something productive for everyone. Mary kept her hard-working pace when others would have found a more rewarding occupation. She went to work more for others than for herself." — From Mary's obituary, by Hope Hunter, the Boyle Street Co-op director.



Dolphus Audi has since passed away. This portrait of him appeared in the first Songs of the Street Poetry Book. Pieter de Vos Jr. took the picture.

John Zapantis' photo of Heather and Barry from the December 1997 Edition.





## A drink for life

By Mark Shafirovitch  
From April 1, 1996 Edition

I'm out of work, I'm all stressed out. I know how the bottle will me mellow out. It takes away the aches and pains; the boss who says "The market's going down the drain"; the woman who would not submit to my stupidity; or the family that I no longer want to see.

I take a swig or maybe two, than grab a glass and have a few. If I was a prophet I could see how the bottle helps me deal with my misery, by bringing me a hundred more and each less complicated than the one before. From buying bottles in the store, to selling off my furniture for more. To when the shakes finally appear, and then life loses forward gears.

By now three quarters of the bottle, my thoughts start to grow pointy ears. My eyes lose sight of reality; they only choose to see a fantasy. A fantasy that's filled with love, happiness and definitely prosperity. My eyes believe this to be true, as long as I don't forget to drink my brew. My legs now take me to where I want to be. Here everybody sees life just like me. And since no one wants to be a part of the minority, if everyone buys a drink here, that's for me. Some here will even help me deal with my present misery. Or I'll find girls, who'll tolerate my personality as long as the brew for them is free. Soon the deuce is almost on the wall, it's time to celebrate last call.

The last joyless occasion for the night, before I have to see my bed in fright. Eventually it's the only piece of furniture left around, since no one buys what one has dumped but I have found. Next the clock hits six, my head, the ceiling, with every ring. I try to figure out where I was and what it was all about then slam the clock across the empty room, and stare in silence at the gloom, brought on by my arch foe, sobriety. This is definitely not the way to be; thank god there is still a quarter of the bottle left for me. I now dread to work in reality.

My boss says, "try harder it will come." I smile at the redhead scum, who's interrupting time with my precious rum. Back at the bar, now that's for me. B.A.R. stands for Be on A Roll, now that doesn't sound so dull.

Oh, I'm sorry, that spells BOAR, but my life is so much better than it was before. My life is so much more carefree, now that my wife and family abandoned me. I have much less responsibility to interrupt my drinkin' days, and soon the job becomes nothing but a distant haze.

Eventually Ul runs out, and welfare is nothing but a four week drought. But I won't ditch my old-time friend. The bottle's honour I will defend. But how could it be, all my friends back at the bar abandoned me. Now that I have such a simple philosophy, "The bottle is the only thing in life for me; I'd rather die now than face sobriety.

The time it takes to go from thick to thin, depends only on the rut you're in. But if the rut turns into a race, my simple philosophy will be your resting place. ♦

## Oblivion

BY Dale Belcourt

From the December 1996 Edition

I saw him one day as I walked down the sidewalk. I stopped and stared because he looked familiar, someone whom I once knew. Looking at him, I could not believe that a person like him would be out and about during the day.

Not wanting to meet his gaze for as long as possible, my eyes wandered down to his feet. I could tell that his footwear used to be shoes by the heels which jutted out from under a mound of duct tape. The tape itself had seen the better part of its days. At first I wondered how he could take them off. Then, on second thought, why would he even want to?

Above the tape I spotted something which could have been socks in their newer days. Today they were nothing but dirt-encrusted cloth, encircling bony ankles.

His socks were partially hidden by frayed and faded pants. The pants were covered with patches on the patches and the seams were held together with safety pins.

Imitating a belt was an assortment of shoe laces, wrapped around a waist that probably would never again expand past the protruding hips that helped to hold up the oversized pants.

A drab olive shirt extended out from under a partially opened coat. Why, I wondered, did he only button the worn grey coat from the top down to the middle? I then looked even closer and I noticed that there were no buttons beyond the waist.

It is funny how the mind drifts off to insignificant

questions. What did it matter what the clothes looked like, or how many buttons were on the coat? What really matters is the eyes and what they hold.

Still avoiding his eyes, I scanned his face, a face surrounded by what resembled string dredged through oil-drenched dirt and thrown on his scalp. It had to be hair, although thickly matted and probably not washed in years. An exaggeration; he must have been at one time a clean and respected person, hadn't he? The face was ravaged, not by time, but from the tolls of existence; an existence that lasted from day-to-day but never for tomorrow.

It was now time to see the part that I feared the most. Those eyes which are the window of his being sucked me down into deep pools of despair in which I thought I would drown. I felt the touch of madness and thin fibres of death. As I fell deeper I saw the gates to a universe of oblivion, where nothing mattered, not life, not even death -- a universe where caring did not exist, where nothing existed.

I screamed then. And as I put my hands to my face I saw that I was holding on to something. I looked at it and realised it was the reason that I was out in the daylight. It was my bottle of wine, still encased in the paper bag. I hurried on, leaving the image in the mirrored window, and those terrible eyes.

As I settled down in my place of hiding I began to giggle, because I knew that I held in my hand the key to that universe, the universe I was about to enter through my wine, where tomorrow wouldn't matter and neither would I.

My last thought before I entered the gates was "I will never go out into the daylight again." ♦

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# My education on the streets as a homeless person

By John Zapantis  
From the August 1995 Edition

**M**y first year of walking "the street beat" as a homeless down-and-out was in Calgary in 1990. I started off pacing up and down the downtown core. It was the first of nearly four years on the street beat. It never dawned on me then that I'd inevitably inherit an unusual set of values that would teach me how to strongly respect a person's time and how to speak and act from a beggar's point of view.

Ohh, yes, that fine moment when mastering the art of diplomacy enabled me to pick the opportune times to put my silver tongue to use. Take this articulate approach to a woman motorist at a downtown parking meter: "Excuse me, ma'am, didn't mean to startle you. Kind of in a hurry, recently arrived in town currently looking for employment and I need accommodation, but before I do all that - could you spare a few dollars so that I can buy a coffee and a paper in hope of finding a warm place, like a Macdonalds, away from this rain?"

All the woman could do was chuckle, realising that I was content with a smile, and with my

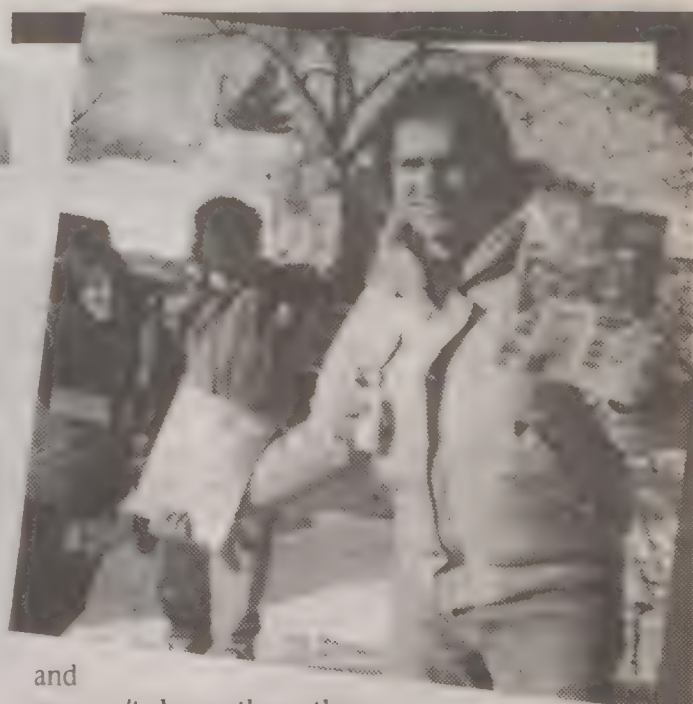


prize, a two-dollar bill out of her purse. She complimented me on my sales presentation: "Have you ever considered a career as a life insurance salesman?" "Yes I have, come to think of it, and I have lived up to every offer along the way," I said and we laughed together.

The scene is not unusual. It's a daily ritual that hundreds of beggars across Canada ply when in need of a few dollars. I've played this WWF tag hold to many different faces all the way from Calgary, Ottawa, Sydney and back to Calgary. A year on the streets is like a whole lifetime of schooling, a different kind of schooling altogether, "the school of life."

Most beggars don't only beg on their time off. They're flexible enough to handle whatever responsibilities come their way, such as a stint through a casual labour office. One day you're shovelling away, you earn \$60 and along come your so-called friends to drink it away, and the next day you find you're begging again. That's the jingle of the streets. But boy I tell you, talking from personal experience, you learn quick how to keep the lid on your earnings. You conform to the way of living on the street and being a loner just to be on the safe side.

What led to my homeless situation? My girlfriend before I hit the street was strongly addicted to alcohol and drugs. After being together off and on for around five years, I'd had enough of her drinking and drugging, coming and going. I was often told by concerned friends, "You can't save their world



and you can't change them, they can only change themselves when they're ready to."

When I had had it up to here, I sat her down one day and told her firmly, "It's either the world or me, what's it going to be?" She walked out the door laughing aloud and said, cynically, "the world, of course." I headed for another world as well, Calgary, the drop-in centre, and the street. It never occurred to me that after I had checked into a flop house and had a bowl of cereal and a coffee the next morning, before heading out the door that cold foggy late October morning in 1990, I'd be on my way to developing and refining my communication skills. I was off getting my education as a homeless person and now, years later, having the privilege of writing my first article on my homeless situation. ♦

John Zapantis has been a regular contributor to Our Voice.



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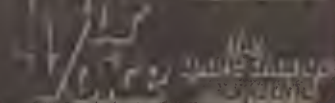
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# A tale from the crack side

By Brian  
From the May 1994 Edition

Last month I wrote about what it was like to go through a drug program. I've left the program and am now back on the street, drug-free. But since I wrote the last article things have gone down hill. I still have not used cocaine since I left the drug program about two weeks ago, but I have slipped back into smoking weed and drinking beer.

I was taking it all as a joke until I got myself into trouble. My neighbours got some money and there was a big party. Well, I just had a conversation with a friend who pointed out that maybe the smoking and drinking is just the way I have gotten used to dealing with my feelings. It's true, every time I got into a fight with my Dad I would drink or snort. My best bet is to stop covering up my feelings and deal with them as straight as possible.

This month I want to let you know about what some of the girls I know go through to get that next fix.

The stories are true, but of course I am changing the names. The first girl is now 18 and I went to school with her.

Sandy ran away a lot because she could not stand living in foster homes. She has a daughter from a former abusive boyfriend who claims the child's not his.

Sandy is what is known as a freebaser and a speed freak. Sandy makes her money as an escort. She got into this through a dealer who bet her a gram of coke that she could not make him climax.

This kept going on and he eventually introduced her to the owner of an escort agency, not a real pimp, but he is still scum. So she does two tricks a day about six times a week. This may seem like a lot, but 12 tricks in a week is nothing compared to what some do.

Sandy has had her daughter taken away. She lives in a rooming house and spends all her money on speed or coke. And still she swears she is not hooked. Yeah, right. I must mention that being an escort is safer than the girls we see on the corner selling their ass for their next fix.

Last Thursday I ran into another girl I know. Coke has put A.J. on the street doing tricks for the past six months. I ran into her as I was walking to the store, and she told me she'd just ripped off "a piece of shit", (a John) for \$200. He was following her down the street and she was scared he was going to hurt her. I was talking to her when he drove up, got out and started to push her. So I wound up fighting this guy.

When the store owner came out and said he was calling the cops, the John took off. A.J. hung out for a bit but I was unable to get her to go to detox or to go home.

I feel very responsible for A.J. because it was only last year that I gave her, her first wack of coke. That was the last time I'd seen her up until last week on the street.

A.J. doesn't have a pimp, and neither does Sandy. There are still pimps but it is not uncommon to find a girl who is not pimped.

The problem, though, is highlighted by the six dead girls in Calgary, all hookers and all independent. It may be safer to have a pimp while working, but then it is harder to leave the lifestyle.

I think they might as well legalize prostitution and make it safer for the girls.

Neither of my friends have major terror stories yet, but there are so many girls who get beaten, raped, stabbed and killed. It now almost doesn't shock me, the stories I hear. I hope both of the girls get cleaned up soon. ♦

An incredible juxtaposition caught photographer Duncan Murdoch's eye in Vancouver. Appeared originally in February 1998 Edition.



## The Poverty Trap

by Chris Norgaard  
From the January 1995 Edition

There are children going to school without warm winter clothing, wearing running shoes even in sub-zero weather. There are people who are shut-ins when the weather turns cold because they have no warm winter clothing.

Living below the poverty line is very stressful, whether you are working full time for a minimum wage, looking for a job, or unable to work due to mental, physical or emotional disabilities.

There are telling stories in the lives of some of our neighbours.

Dan and his wife are both on 'medical,' which means they are on long-term social assistance. Neither of them is considered employable; they just can't work. Before his neck injury, Dan ran a successful drywall company. His wife was a jewellery designer before she became unable to work. They have three children.

"Our daughter needs winter boots," says Dan. "She is still going to school in shoes." It was minus 20.

I remember having the same problem. I sent my daughter to school without winter boots or mittens, but with a note for the teacher requesting that she be allowed to stay inside at noon. The teacher, instead of keeping her inside, gave my daughter the clothing she needed. Unfortunately, not many schools have on hand a supply of clothing for the students.

Dan and his family were managing fairly well within their social services budget until all of the cutbacks came. Since then it has been a month-to-month struggle which gets more dif-

ficult all the time. Dan had to stop driving the car. The children had to switch schools when bus passes for students were cut. The family started using the food bank for the first time.

According to Dan the worst part is that people expect them to accept anything because they are poor. "We've been given spoiled food and had to throw it in the garbage," he says.

Being poor is a shame. It means being looked upon as a failure and, in some churches where prosperity is taught, it means being looked upon as a sinner as well.

Being poor is costly. You may end up having to pay late charges on bills when you can't pay them on time. You can't afford to buy in bulk or catch the sales, or take advantage of special offers.

Being poor can be very isolating. You may have to give up driving a car, or having a telephone. Even the bus may be too costly, and stamps and envelopes are out.

You may be thought of as dirty as well. There are times when the clothes and the dishes go unwashed because there is no soap. You may have to wait for days to wash your hair or to shave while waiting to get shampoo or razors. When toilet paper and toothpaste run out, you do without.

Being poor means eating whatever you can get, not what you like or what you know is nutritious. You eat too much macaroni and cheese, pork and beans, bread and pastry. You have to scrounge for food, and make the rounds of different agencies. It is often assumed that you need courses on nutrition or on how to cook on a budget. The truth is that cookbooks may be useless because you seldom have enough ingredients, and there may be days when you don't cook at all because there is nothing to cook.

Being poor means living on the edge without a safety net. Even small things can represent major losses. Stress leaves you exhausted, and poor nutrition leaves you tired. Survival takes up all of your strength. ♦



Pieter de Vos Jr.'s picture of "the grand-daddy of the drag" resting. Appeared in the Songs of the Street Poetry Book Volume II.

# POETRY

## To All But God

by Heather Slade

When you see me  
you see only  
a fat Indian  
an ugly woman  
a too young mother  
a shabby dresser  
When you hear me  
you hear only  
a toothy lisp  
a faltering memory  
a too talkative loner  
a frustrated yell  
If you delve a little deeper  
you'll find  
poor health—a drain to health care  
two kids—a drain to welfare  
mental illness—a drain the sane  
You'll never know the beautiful child  
who loved to dress up as a princess  
or the dynamic grad speaker  
who had the crowd on its feet  
or the vibrant bride full of hope  
for a lifelong partner in love  
to you I remain  
pitiful, worthless, unlovable  
—to all but God  
You think I don't see your arrogant sneer  
don't hear your hostile snicker  
as I lug groceries and kids  
and my own swollen body  
on buses, through malls  
across busy streets  
I keep my eyes down  
but my head up  
I turn stone deaf  
to the jagged slurs  
I choke back a tear  
and keep my mouth shut  
now my pain becomes visceral  
it cannot be hidden  
so I can dance like St. Vitas  
and draw more stares still  
I'm reminded of how I must seem  
how pathetic, how odd  
I can't prove my beauty  
—to any but God.

Appeared in the Songs of the Street Poetry Book Volume III

## A Story

by Emma Stuart

The city. All of its disease and rot  
beaded like oil off his back.  
Sliding like jeweled moons and jupiter.  
Diamonds and violet pearls in the sewer.

Steel towers shot straight and fierce  
into the sky.  
Shining, blinding, crouching creatures  
huddled in their nests of concrete  
shooting blood rot fever into the vein.

But he is high.

Pure as infant blood and striding,  
he thanks the Messiah.  
He had sandals and matches,  
and when he speaks  
His voice is yellow velvet.  
His voice is gold silk  
into the exhaust.

He asks for water this morning.  
He thinks it's wine.  
Crimson, staining, soothing the dark reaches  
of his tongue  
and back into the flower of his throat.

His beard is woven  
with no one.  
Robes covering him from no one.  
He is walking,  
drawn forward to heaven  
by the sun to save us.

He passes me on his way.  
Sympathy and salvation are traded.

I say:  
Messiah your sandals are breaking!  
The sidewalk will burn your feet!

But he said he was walking on water,  
and passed me softly on the street.

Appeared in the Songs of the Street Poetry Book Volume II



## Sorrow and Fear

by Susan Kerr

A blonde-haired, blue-eyed boy  
with a joyous laugh,  
and a sparkling eye.  
With a gentle nature and soul.  
You are my son.

I fought to keep you safe with me,  
to open the world for you,  
without fear of rejection.  
They forced me to choose between  
those one or three.

I cried as I signed the papers.  
I hated their guts.  
I hated the one that said  
that he'd stand and protect my son.  
He didn't.

I was lost in a maze of emotion.  
Paranoid, lost and afraid.  
They saw only the surface.  
The truth I couldn't show them.  
I was afraid.

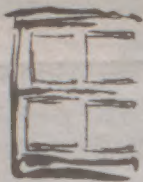
And all of my fears came true.  
I lost my darling boy,  
and though I wish to find him,  
I have not the money to search for him.  
Where is he?

Time has dulled the aching.  
But the pain has not gone away.  
I want my son, wherever he is.  
I want to know him again.  
Does he want to know me?

I am afraid.

Appeared in the Songs of the Street Poetry Book Volume II





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Duncan Murdoch's  
picture of street buskers  
in Vancouver appeared  
in the August 1998  
Edition.



## Struggling to get by in Saskatoon

by Ron Murdoch

Ron was an **Our Voice** vendor in Saskatoon. From the July 15, 1996 Edition

**M**uch has been said about welfare reforms in Alberta, Ontario and other provinces. Some people have applauded, while others have used graphic descriptions for the reforms. It all depends on where you are on the economic scale. The working poor have to watch every nickel and dime, trying to raise a family and make ends meet, hoping that the end of the month bills don't climb faster than the monthly income.

Myself, I can remember one tough winter in 1986. I worked at a gas station in Saskatoon, I worked part-time at \$4.50 an hour, which meant about \$300 a month. I was getting less than I would have on welfare. \$180 went for rent, leaving \$30 a week to forage for food at Safeway and with the specials at Shoppers Drug Mart. Not much was left for entertainment. A treat was the \$3.50 lasagna/coffee special at the nearby Ninos on a Sunday evening. Taking a city bus was out of the question. I went everywhere on foot, even when it got cold, no matter what the wind chill.

After three months of hacking it, I dumped the gas station job and did odd jobs for four months. Things got marginally better, but it was either feast or famine. By June of 1997 I was looking for something better and headed for Vancouver, where I found full time work almost immediately, enjoyed warmer winters, and had many more options in life with better pay.

Now I find myself back in Saskatoon, selling **Our Voice**. Life can be tough. And not just for me. Following are two stories about families who are working hard to just stay ahead.

## Grin and bear it

**L**awrenceo makes about \$1400 a month in his home maintenance job, and it all goes for low cost housing and support for his wife and two teenaged sons. His last pay raise was several years ago, and he says taxes would gobble up any pay increase. His work pays his gas bills for his car which he has to use, but it doesn't nearly cover the cost of running the vehicle. If it breaks down on the job, Lawrenceo has to pay the whole bill, and to make matters worse, his pay is docked for the down time while his car is getting fixed.

Edie Megysi is a single mother of two boys and she has a job packaging spices, oatmeal, popcorn packs, cake mixes and other miscellaneous items at the Saskatchewan Abilities Council. The pay is not good. Edie only makes \$51 more a month than she would on welfare.

There's only one other 'perk', a monthly bus pass.

Things are tight in the Megysi household. From mid-month on, food can get scarce. When her two youngsters, 6 and 10, start to ask for more to eat, Edie feels humiliated, to the point of tears. She can't give her sons all they need. She gets to the food bank sometimes, but it's hard to find the time to go, wait there, make the bus connections and haul the food.

Entertainment for Edie and her boys is limited. Staying home and creatively finding fun things for Adrian and Eddie to do is the norm. Edie relies a lot on her spiritual beliefs to get through the current lean times. With the help of God's grace Edie hopes to find a man who can financially support her and her two sons. She doesn't want to start a serious relationship with a man in the same working poor class.

Edie can see why government would be cutting back in welfare reform, but she feels government should look in the mirror first, before slashing.

Lawrenceo thinks current welfare reforms should be flushed down the toilet. His concern is that reforms will affect people who are really looking for work or trying to improve themselves with school or upgrading. Reforms should target the abusers of the system, he feels. In some cases people on welfare are better off than the working poor. Their rent gets paid and dental and medical coverage is included. Lawrenceo has dental coverage, but he has to pay the first 75% of the bill before getting compensated. On the other hand he sees welfare recipients ending up in inadequate housing, right alongside the working poor people.

Lawrenceo expects more of the same from life in the near future. He does not look for leadership from the upper class, multi-national corporations or government, but looks for ideas to get out of his current mess from a Loving Creator. Lawrenceo cannot expect anything from the authorities from the way they've handled his two sons. Both have spent time in foster homes and he thinks the homes are not more than money-making rackets.

Apart from his church life, Lawrenceo sees total disaster. Extras like restaurant meals and coffee are out of the question. His wife makes regular trips to the food bank to help out with food supplies. For the time being Lawrenceo grins and bears it and tries not to get overly pessimistic. ♦



# Drop-in diary

By Michael Walters  
From the June 15, 1996 Edition

Ah, sweet sunshine. The air was so fresh, the snow was almost all melted away. Spring was here and life seemed so much better.

It was just after one in the afternoon, and I could hear the Drop-in Center staff putting away the last of the chairs and cleaning up the cups and ashtrays left by the people who had visited that day. Even though the Bissell Center closed at one o'clock every Friday, the **Our Voice** distribution office remained open until three.

I was sitting in the office with John; drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and shootin' the shit. We had all the business out of the way. He had his papers, and I had the money, so we had time to sit around and talk. John was telling me about a couple of books he had read recently.

"You gotta read *Down and out in Paris and London*. George Orwell!" he recommended excitedly with his mad scientist type demeanor. "And I just finished *Moveable Feast*! Hemingway cracks me up!" his laughter poured out of the large smile spread over his face. "He's marvelous."

These are books I was definitely going to read. I trusted John's choices in literature.

Soon after White Eagle calmly sauntered into the office. He took off his coat, set his bag on the floor and poured himself a cup of coffee. White Eagle was a man who tugged at my unhealthy heart strings. He had lived on the streets more often than not for the past fifteen years. His face was leathery and rough. His eyes were permanently tired and showed no hope.

**There was a beautiful spirit ...it wasn't that I could see it necessarily, but it was so easily felt.**

Even though John and White Eagle were both vendors, they sold the paper for different reasons. John sold the paper to pay his rent, buy some tobacco, the odd beer, and to pay his annual library fees. White Eagle on the other hand was a very sick man, and spent the money he made from the paper on the medicine he needed to remain barely alive. He seemed so lost in this world. Behind his dirty clothes, defensive attitude and pained expressions, there was a beautiful spirit. It wasn't that I could see it necessarily, it was so easily felt. Underneath the piled years of poverty, frustration, and abuses, sat quietly, a very decent and kind man. If someone saw White Eagle on the street, chances are

his appearance would remove any faith they may have had in him, but I trusted this man completely. He had no reason to be dishonest anymore.

White Eagle didn't stay too long.

"Gotta get to work. Can't sit around much these days," he confessed as he looked into his scarred and soiled hands. And, as fast as he came in, he was gone.

John left too and I was left alone with myself and my thoughts. The rest of the building seemed deserted; the only sound I could hear was the labouring of my lungs as they sucked in another cigarette.

I started to wonder about what people who pass the vendors on the streets think. Do they immediately stereotype them as vagrants and lazy bums, or do they consider them to be real people doing something viable to earn a living?

Obviously people who sell the paper aren't suit and tie guys who drive nice cars and golf in the summer. Then again most people aren't. I'm not that kind of guy, and I'm quite thankful for that actually.

Do people realise how intelligent John is when they walk by him on the street? Do people realise how kind and spiritual White Eagle is when they pass by his corner? Maybe it's unfair for me to ask these questions. Before I started volunteering and working for this newspaper, I myself wouldn't have been able to answer them. But now I can honestly say that I know some things. I realise some vendors at times cause some grief. They are poor and have their share of problems to deal with in life. That is why this paper exists. There are vendors who always do well and cause no grief to anyone. They are always kind and easy to get along with. Of course their lives still remain as real as anyone else's.

I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes. I drew a vision of all the people who have ever noticed an **Our Voice** vendor in my mind. Then I spoke to them.

"Maybe you don't want to buy a paper from them. Hey, that's okay. But at least give them the same credit you'd give somebody you see who's wearing a suit and a tie."

Maybe I'm wrong, but life has to go a lot deeper than that. ♦

**Our Voice** 5 YEARS ON THE STREET



Duane, photographed by Pieter de Vos Jr. Photo appeared in the first *Songs of the Street Poetry Book*.



From **REAL CHANGE**, Seattle's Street publication.



# NEWS OF THE WORLD

## Pigs and people making dramatic escapes

In Wiltshire, two pigs became international heroes after breaking free from an abattoir. In Hungary, meanwhile, two men escaped from a prison in Miskolc by the novel ruse of gluing themselves to their guard. Trouble started when warder Anton Getz, 41, opened the door of the cell occupied by robbers John Czetich and Carol Popesca. "As I swung the door open," he explained, "they each grabbed one of my hands. I thought they were going to hurt me, but they didn't do anything, just stood there smiling. It was only when I tried to shake them off that I realized they'd superglued themselves to me." When applications of surgical spirit failed to separate the trio, they were driven to a nearby hospital to have the job done professionally, only for the two prisoners to leap out of a window and run away as soon as their hands were unstuck. "Henceforth I'll be doing my round in gloves," said an embarrassed Mr Getz.

## Berlin Liars' Congress seeks truth

It's been an interesting week for liars. In California, a survey has revealed that the average

American lies 180 times per day. In Germany, meanwhile, delegates have come together for the first International Liars' Congress, held over three days in Berlin. The congress was the brainchild of lifelong liar Helmut Stank, 45, who wanted to provide a forum "for those who simply can't tell the truth". From the outset, however, the project ran into problems. "I sent out 2,000 invitations," explained Mr Stank, "but most people didn't believe them, so we only had 12 acceptances, of which four were hoaxes." The eight delegates who did attend found they had nowhere to stay because Mr Stank had lied about finding accommodation for them, whilst the Greek delegate left after the first day claiming his mother had died, which turned out to be completely untrue. A lecture by Helmut Kohl, meanwhile, turned out to be a damp squib when the latter proved to be a meat packer from Hamburg rather than the German Chancellor. "The whole thing was a huge success," lied Mr Stank, whose real name is actually Werner Schmidt.

## Inner camp voice calls skunk and bears

It's all been going horribly wrong for campers. In Yorkshire, a man was seriously injured after his tent slid off the cliff top on which he'd pitched it. Equally disastrous were the experiences of American Casper Muffin, probably the most unfortunate camper of all time. Mr Muffin, 53, of Pocatello, had gone camping to "access my inner self". From the outset, however, things went wrong. "I borrowed a tent," he explained. "But it didn't seem to have a door, so I had to erect it with me inside, and then take it down whenever I wanted to get out, which was a nuisance because I wee a lot." On the first night his small stove

exploded, setting light to his sleeping bag, while he had to move his tent nine times because skunks kept letting loose beside it. He was eventually forced to call rescue services on his mobile phone when bears surrounded his camp, whereupon he was almost killed when a helicopter inadvertently landed on his tent. "I heard my inner voice," admitted Mr Muffin, "And it said 'Hell with camping!'"

## Biting back: lobsters and the very lucky lips

And what's been happening with lobsters and lips? In Denmark, biologists have discovered a new life-form clinging to the lips of the Norwegian lobster. Described as an animated cold sore, the creature has no brain and a mouth alongside its bottom. In Spain, meanwhile, a man attended a job interview with a lobster clamped to his face. Manuel Francato, 24, was on his way to the interview at a Barcelona bank when he passed through a local fish market. "There were these huge lobsters in a tank," he explained. "I picked one up and kissed it and then it bit me on the lip." Unable to remove the belligerent shellfish, the pained interviewee was forced to purchase it, going on to his meeting with it still stuck to his face. "At first they thought I was deformed," recalled Mr Francato. "But I told them it was just a lobster and then we got on with it." To his delight he was offered the job. "Lobsters are clearly lucky and I shall be wearing them more often," he enthused.

NEWS OF THE WORLD was the popular feature written by Paul Sussman in *The Big Issue*, London, England's street-sold magazine. Four choice "newsies" are reprised here for the Anniversary Issue.



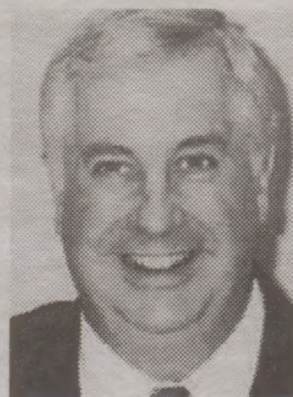
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# Our the spare change Voice magazine

Some of the faces of Our Voice  
over the years.  
Composition: Keith Wiley